IN HIS OWN HAND.

AUTHOR OF

"GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE."

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IN HIS OWN HAND.

BY

MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS,

AUTHORESS OF

"GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE," "THE MANCHESTER MAN," "FORBIDDEN TO MARRY," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

F. V. WHITE & CO.,

31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

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PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C. ;
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

PREFATORY WORDS.

I WAS little more than a child when I first came across the outline of William Hutton's life, and thought "what a good tale it would make." A few years later, when I was the wife of a Birmingham man, I met with Hutton's history of that town, and his own autobiography also. The same thought recurred to me, with the addendum that I should like to be the writer of the tale. At that time I had laid down my literary pen, and did not take it up again for a long and changeful period. Meanwhile the outline biography first read turned up occasionally in the same old magazine and kept the original idea alive. In 1864 I sat down to my pen-work in earnest, following up fugitive poems with "God's Providence House," and just as I had begun to collect materials for "The Manchester Man" far in advance of my writing, so, as far back as 1868, began my slow gathering of materials for the story now before my readers, accumulating in the process much that was useless for my purpose. It was not

until the work was in hand that I became aware of Mr. Llewellyn Jewitt's admirable "History of the Hutton Family," and availed myself of it. How far I am justified in working the facts of a real life into fiction may be a matter of opinion. At all events in so doing I only follow illustrious examples, from Shakespeare downwards, and no one would be better pleased than William Hutton himself could he know. In the building up of a human life, however insignificant, scores of people contribute, who come and go, cast their individual stones upon the cairn, and pass out of sight to be heard of or seen no more. Across the chequered web of William Hutton's career many threads were shot to strengthen or diversify the fabric—threads broken off short or dropped without a recognizable name. It is out of those dropped threads that I have constructed and woven my fabric of fiction, around that which is already history. I have in nowise garbled fact; I have only supplemented it with the possible, and found a hero where he only casually alludes to a stranger's children. Moreover, I have not taken W. H. altogether at his own valuation. I have looked at him and his through a speculum of my own. It is for my readers to estimate results.

ISABELLA BANKS.

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IN HIS OWN HAND.

CHAPTER I.

HARD BLOWS.

It was Nottingham race week, July, 1741. The town was astir with life and animation, from the lowest meadow on the banks of the shining Trent and Leen, to the highest tier of rocky street; aye, or to the Castle perched on its solitary steep high above them all. All was astir save the windmills, and they seemed to take holiday lazily, out of regard for the breezeless air. Holidays and amusements for the people were few, and the excitement rose in proportion. Amongst the toilers especially —with them the festival became almost a carnival, second only to that of the Goose Fair at Michaelmas.

Sunshine, liberty, clean faces, and gay attire, if but a new ribbon or a kerchief! Were not these sufficient to make young hearts

exuberant, even if their feet strayed far away from the racecourse, and their eyes never rested on jockey or flying horse? Was it not also a week of rejoicing to the wee toilers of tender years, who were so lucky as to have a day or two of release?

Aye, the very rock on which old Nottingham was built must have felt it to its inmost cavern, as the streets re-echoed the sound of running feet, laughter and salutation, whether the tones were soft and silvery, or resonant and rough.

The aged and careworn, sick and solitary, must have felt it, some in gladness, some in gloom. And the workers to whom the holiday had been denied must have felt it, and not pleasantly.

There was one youth, in his eighteenth year, to whom the week had been neither pleasant nor profitable.

The sunshine and the laughter, the woodlands and the wild-flowers, the walks by the broad bright waters, the display of new attire before admiring feminine eyes, had been joys denied to him. And the joys of his life had been so few, so very few, that the deprivation had been the greater hardship. He was, moreover, of a lively, cheerful disposition, one who loved better to hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak, and he resented accordingly the

harshness which kept him close at his stocking-frame, when all the other apprentices were allowed their liberty.

The work-shop, or frame-room, was on the ground floor, and more than one of William Hutton's companions had put his head in at the small-paned casement of the window, which almost reached from wall to wall, open on account of the heat, and asked why he could not join them.

Worse than all had been the alternate jeers and commiseration of a fellow apprentice named Joseph Roper, a farmer's son, who had long been urging William to break his bonds and run off along with him.

"Come along, Will," that worthy had said on the Saturday morning, as he left the lair by courtesy called a bed, "the lasses are all about as fine as fi'pence. What's the good of thy new clothes if thou mayn't show them? Art' afead of thy uncle's stick?"

"No." But the no was not by any means hearty.

"Well, thou mowt be, or thou'd not sit there at thy frame when all t'others are enjoying theirselves. Dolly says as thou'rt a bit of a coward: an' I think it's true, for if thoud'st a spark of spirit thou'd be up an' off."

Roper was gone, but he had left behind a sting to rankle in the young fellow's breast.

"Dolly thought him a coward, did she? Dolly! with her saucy ways and arch glances. Dolly, for whose smile half the 'prentices in Woolpack Lane were contending. And she had told Roper so—Roper, of all fellows! Told him with a laugh perhaps—Well, if she had, what did it matter to him?"

Whether it mattered or not the thought gave an ill-flavour to the scant supply of brown bread and milk at breakfast time, and sent him back to his frame in anything but the spirit for honest work. It may be there was latent within his breast the grain of truth which poisoned the random shaft.

Was he not bound hand and foot to his uncle, George Hutton, as closely as any other apprentice to any other master? And what if his brother Thomas, as close a bond-slave, bore his lot with passive equanimity. Was it more endurable to himself, who had a different temperament, and chafed under the hardships and restrictions he dared not resent? Had not his uncle added poignancy to Roper's sting over that very morning's breakfast?

"You may have this day to yourself, Tom," he had said. "You have stuck quietly to your work all week and finished your task; and if you have not the nimble fingers of Will, here, 'slow and steady goes far in a day.' As for you," and he had turned angrily

upon Will, "'the bird that can sing and won't sing, must be made to sing.' Your task was not finished yestereve; so there is no holiday for you; and if you don't make up for your week's laziness by nightfall I'll thrash you soundly, you lazy dog."

With that threat ringing in his ears from a man who kept his word at any cost, what booted it to the youth that his uncle was by nature kind, since he was under the thumb of his ill-conditioned wife, and could by her be spurred to severity?

Was it not she who in her parsimony and hypocrisy had settled that Will and Tom "had best be kept at their frames all the race week out of the way of temptation?" And did he not know that, besides his uncle's legal power to restrain or punish, she at least had all the will? Had he not seen one tender apprentice goaded by starvation, ill-usage, hard and uncongenial work, boldly run away, only to be brought back, beaten, and set at his frame with a log chained to his foot? And did he not envy the spirit of the determined little lad, which had enabled him to make good his escape at last?

Aye, for he was conscious that *he* dared not brave his uncle's supreme will, and with that threat hanging over him walk out of the house boldly even for an hour's holiday. Still

a spirit of rebellion had been roused; he inwardly resented his taskmaster's causeless injustice, since it was well known with what unflagging industry he had wrought to compass a new suit of clothes with the few odd pence he could earn by overwork; and he felt he was as fairly entitled to a holiday as that double-faced Roper, who had crept so slily into the good graces of his master's wife.

Previous apprenticeship in a silk mill had given to William a delicate nicety of touch, and such had been his skill and dexterity that during fully half of his past three years' service he had been employed only to make the finest thread or silk stockings, and both he and his master knew him to be a good hand. But he, that week, had worked with such leaden fingers that only the closest unremitting toil and attention could enable him to complete his appointed task for the day; and for that he was in no congenial mood. He went to the open window, and leaning on the sill with his coarse shirtsleeves rolled up, watched the passers-by, and brooded over his own wrongs instead of taking his place at his frame to make the best of matters.

He had quite depended on having at least the Saturday to himself, and had arranged to

walk with Thomas and two or three others to the Shepherd's Race, a maze or labyrinth in the green turf, now ploughed up, but then in existence, at Sneinton, about two miles from the town, and much frequented by young people, who amused themselves by chasing each other through its hollow turns and windings. Dolly, the wonderful Dolly, the lacemaker, to whom in his shabbiness he had never yet ventured to speak, was to be of the party, and he had hoped for an opportunity to break the ice, and perhaps win a word or a smile from her. And now all this was at an end. She thought him a coward because he dared not brave the cudgel and make his own holiday.

This served him as a reminder of his Uncle George's threat. He turned from the window, looked disconsolately at the empty frames in the rooms, like so many big skeletons of easy chairs, with rows of wire teeth grinning at him in their high backs, and stepped over the wooden side-bar of his own frame with a heavy sigh. He sat down on the narrow seat with his back against the low wooden bar for support, and soon, with his feet on the treadles and his head bent, his fingers were at work looping the thread on the outer needles, and the double rows of fine bright wires went glancing up and down, in and out,

with a metallic creak; but his heart did not throb eagerly to his finger tips, and the long stocking grew but slowly.*

George Hutton was not a racing man. He had gone to Leicester on business, and whilst there had heard of the failure of a London hosier who owed him a hundred pounds, a large sum to a man with but small capital—the value of money being very much greater than now, as it may be well to remember.

He had mounted his nag in the morning with full saddle-bags, and an additional load of ill-humour, as little pleased with himself as with his nephew-apprentice. He returned at the close of the long July day, weary, depressed, and out of sorts altogether. Trade had been too bad to empty his saddle-bags, and he had an extra load in the knowledge of his great loss, which it might take him years to repair.

Into the frame-room he marched, determination in every step his heavy riding-boots set on the hard white plaster floor.

Down went William's courage into his very shoes, for his work was not yet done. It would have taken an hour or more to complete it.

"So you have not done the task I ordered?" began the elder.

* One of these antique stocking frames was on show at the late Health Exhibition, minus the bar at the back of the seat.

Never a word said the conscience-stricken youth in the frame.

"Was it in your power to have done it?"

Still silence.

"*Could* you have done it?"

William Hutton did not foster lying among his shortcomings. He could not screen himself by a subterfuge. Without looking up, he answered, timidly enough, "I could."

Maybe his uncle took the answer for the utterance of a dogged sullenness.

"Then I'll make thee," he said in a quiet tone of concentrated wrath, the gathered ire of a day's annoyance.

William shrank within the narrow confines of his frame. He saw his uncle wrest the long stale or handle of white hazel wood from a ling besom, kept in a far corner to sweep up the flue and bits of yarn from the plaster floor, and come towards him grasping the tough and rugged stick in his right hand.

With his left he clutched at the young man's waistcoat collar, and, heedless of his entreaties, dragged him from the shelter of the frame in which he was crouching, and said with deliberate incisiveness, as he held the long, thick broom-handle over him, "Many a time and oft have you been told, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.' You have not put your might into your work

this week. But I will give you such a lesson to-night as shall serve you as long as you live. I have to punish sloth and disobedience, and I shall certainly do it with *my* might."

And he did. There was no remorse, no relenting, the stockinger's face was set and hard as a flint, and had his nephew's body been a senseless stone he could not have rained his blows upon it with less compunction.

As the heavy stick came down with a repeated thud, thud, thud on the writhing form of the ill-fed apprentice, his piteous shrieks, "Mercy, mercy, uncle! Don't, don't! Mercy!" rent the air; but George Hutton might have been deaf.

Others were not. The windows were open, the evening calm, the resounding blows and cries together roused the neighbourhood. An inquiring crowd gathered outside the house, intruded within the guardian palisades, but there was no hope of rescue for the shrieking victim on whom the blows continued to fall until he thought every bone in his body was broken.

"What's the matter?" William heard one ask in the outside throng.

"Oh! only Hutton thrashing one of his lads!" was the answer.

"Is that all?"

And no more pity or curiosity was exhibi-

ted, so common, so very common an occurrence was the thrashing of an apprentice within an inch of his life.

No, though it was not until the tough hazel stick broke in his weary hand that George Hutton ceased to belabour the nephew entrusted to his care and keeping (who had laboured, against the grain, for his sole profit), never, in all that while, did aunt or pitiful neighbour once interfere to arrest a blow. Custom had deadened compassion.

And it was not until the panting master wrung the sweat from his brow, and flung the broken handle into a corner, that the cowering slave ventured to mutter, "I wish Mr. Webb had been at home, I do. Ye'd ha' been ashamed to serve a dog as you've served me, before him."

"Would I, you lazy good-for-naught?" A gleam as of fresh lightning shot from unquiet eyes, as the words burst in a stormy gust from angry lips, and a swollen hand went forth involuntarily towards the discarded cudgel; "What care I for Mr. Webb?"

Alarmed by the effects of his own temerity, the cowed lad slunk away from the dread presence of superior power, and with many a sob and groan sought the garret where his hard chaff bed seemed to be filled with stones, so sore was every joint and limb. But not a

bruise on his body was smarting like the wounds inflicted on his pride and self-respect.

It might have been some balm for those wounds could he have seen how the reference to Mr. Webb had re-acted on his uncle, or the shame he felt that what he had done must reach that individual's ears.

An hour or so later, Roper, Thomas and another lad came up the stairs in the dark as usual, Roper in high glee and mock sympathy, adding to his pain with a story of the day's delights, and a string of invented anecdotes. He wound up with "Bill had best ha' gone too. He could but ha' been licked then; and sticking at his frame hath not saved his bacon. He hath not the spirit of a mouse, or he'd ne'er ha' stood thrashing like a mongrel cur. Afore I'd ha' taken such a licking I'd ha' snatched th' besom stale out o' master's hands and cracked his crown with it! Ay, if I'd gone to gaol fur it!" An oath closed this bold assertion, as Roper threw himself on his hard pillow, well satisfied with his vaunted prowess, and its effects on the other.

William had feigned sleep through it all, but as Thomas stretched his tired limbs alongside his brother's aching ones, and dragged the rug which served for bed-clothes, or slightly touched him, nature was too strong for deception, and an ill-suppressed moan told

the braggart that he was awake, and must have heard.

Ay, awake! And so he lay all that night through, thinking, thinking, thinking, and still thinking, his mind as full of pain as his body. And when the dawn peered stealthily in through the thick bull's-eye panes of the small window, tingeing all their faces a sallow green, it found him still awake, and still thinking out the unsolvable problem of his young life.

Hard words, hard fare, and hard knocks had been his from his earliest years. Was it possible to find the outer world harder than he had found his own kith and kin? Had not Roper over and over again advised him to run away—nay, offered to be his companion? But he had no faith in Roper: he might want him out of the way, and if he ran off all chance of Dolly was gone. She then would never know how he had watched her window after dark only to see her shadow cross the blind; how he had followed her afar off in her Sunday walks to see that no one molested her: she would never know how blindly he had worshipped her as a star set in a firmament above him. Better stay and endure than lose sight of pretty Dolly.

In this mood, and with a proud resolve not to utter a syllable of complaint, he rose the

next morning. Not with the others: he did not care to strip before them and expose the wheals and bruises which he felt as a shame and a disgrace to his rising manhood. He had a clean shirt on when he followed the others down to wash at the pump in the yard at the back; and being exempted from the menial duties of the ordinary 'prentice by the necessity to keep his fingers soft and delicate to handle the silk he knitted up, he was able to come down to the breakfast the others had helped to prepare, in his new suit of best clothes, bent on showing his bravery in more senses than one.

He was not the first to gather courage from a good suit of clothes, and will not be the last. His gave him courage to slight the friendly overtures of his uncle, who had slept his anger off, and was no doubt sorry, and to pay no heed to the cutting allusions of his aunt, who was not sorry. When he left the house with the rest to go to the Meeting-House—the Huttons were Dissenters—he went in anything but a spirit of forgiveness or humility in the sight of his Creator. His chief thought was of captivating and enslaving the hitherto unapproachable Dolly when he met her in his new bravery.

Service over, churches and meeting-house alike sent forth their congregations, but the

fair one was not to be seen. He had dressed for naught.

"Have some cherries, Will?" said his uncle, pushing the plate towards him after dinner.

Thrusting the peace-offering aside with disdain, he stalked out into the garden and leant over the wooden palisades in gloomy resentment. All at once his eyes rested on Dolly coming along the lane with streaming pink ribbons on her straw hat, and a bright gingham skirt inflated by a hoop, which was a vulgar caricature of high fashion. All lace was then hand made, and the worker felt her own importance.

He raised his new three-cornered hat as deferentially as if she had indeed been a lady; flushing from his brow to finger-tips.

He had never heard a syllable from those red lips. He hardly dared hope she would open them for him. He would be content with a smile of recognition.

She did recognize him.

She turned her face towards him in passing.

A smile of intense scorn curled those ruddy lips, and lit with baleful rays the eyes he had adored as heavenly blue.

She spoke.

"So yow warr licked last neet!" came sneeringly out between those rows of pearly

teeth, and the lips he had so often longed to kiss.

Six words only! But they scathed like lightning; killed on the spot love, admiration, respect. His eyes followed her, opened wide, but his heart shrank and closed. The current of a life was changed.

CHAPTER II.

THE RUNAWAY.

"A FAIR face and a cruel heart," William Hutton muttered to himself as the girl turned a corner and was lost to sight. "I've learned more from my uncle's 'licking' than was counted on overnight. I've been an ass, and been paid like an ass. But I won't need the same lesson twice. My mind's made up now," and with his face set gloomily, he turned indoors. His soberly-dressed uncle and aunt were about to start for the Meeting-House on the Low Pavement, whither the apprentices were expected to follow. He took his hat from the peg and put it on his head as if to join them, but as Thomas and Roper went out at the door, he slipped up the shady staircase instead.

"Where's that Will?" he heard his aunt in the passage below ask peevishly.

There was a tone of self-reproach in the milder voice of his uncle as he answered,

"Gone on before, poor lad. He takes the thrashing I gave him more to heart than I

expected. I'm sorry now I had not more control over my temper ; though I had crosses in Leicester enow to put a man out, without a lad's sullen tongue at the end."

"Sorry, indeed! 'Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying,'" replied the aunt severely, as she passed the foot of the dark stairs, which rose abruptly from the passage, and ran between the walls of the frame-room and the house-place at the back.

"Aye, aye, Ann, so you said last night; but I've a notion that if we'd ever had a son of our own, you'd have found a milder scripture, and I'd ha' taken a softer stick to Will."

The snapping to of the door, and the turning of the key in the lock, drowned any reply the childless wife might have made.

Will turned to the work before him without waste of time, now the coast was clear, not, however, without a momentary feeling of compunction for the loss his uncle would sustain when his best silk knitter was gone. There was no longer any question of his staying, Dolly had decided that.

He seemed to forget his smarting limbs in the newer smart, as he doffed his fine new suit of brown cloth, and having donned his older one, made free with an old leather saddle-bag, long and narrow, into which they went with

due care. A linen bag, such as was used to fetch raw silk from the spinners, was hastily crammed with a coarse blend-corn loaf (a mixture of barley, wheat, and rye), some butter in an old copybook leaf, one or two needful articles of apparel; a new Bible for which he had recently given three of his hardly-earned shillings; and at the top of all, to preserve it from crushing—his best wig. Most men at that time sought to improve upon nature by shaving their pates, and covering them with substitutes for the hair God gave; but as all men had not the means to pay for perukes of real hair, the heads of poorer ones were artificially thatched with sheep's wool, with which, perhaps, they had some sort of affinity.

Having disposed of his wig, and tied the ends of the two bags together, he bethought him that he was penniless, and that it was impossible to face the world without money.

Swift upon the thought began a hasty rummage, for time was flying and the longest service must have an end, whether at church or chapel.

He knew George Hutton kept his money and valuable papers in a curious old oak desk that he had bought from his wife's father, a desk with a carved front and two supplementary drawers like wings on either side.

To this he went at once; but though all the rest of the house was open to him the desk was locked, and for a moment he was baffled.

He was searching for the means to flee, but such a crime as forcing the lock was no more a dream of his than was the ruthless forcing of that same lock in the far future.

Only for a moment he stood dismayed. In the wainscotted parlour upstairs stood an oaken bœuffet, in which was kept glass and china as something too rare for common use, as was the room itself. Just as his heart began to fail he caught a gleam at the bottom of a tall glass. There lay ten shillings ready to his hand.

Afraid of his own temerity, yet with scarcely a reflection that he was stealing, he took—not the ten—but two shillings from the ten, and reclosed the bœuffet.

There was no outlet but the front door, and that was locked. The small back yard was shut in by a wall higher than his own head. It looked formidable, but determination soon landed both himself and his bags on the other side in a narrow bye-way.

"Hullo! Wheer be yow off to?" greeted him from a companion, as his feet touched the ground.

Here was a check at the outset. Nothing daunted he took the other hurriedly into his

confidence, the while he looped his best three-cornered hat to a coat button, and adjusted the bags, which he swung to balance each other over the left shoulder.

There was a deprecatory shake of the head, a promise of rigid secrecy, a hasty grip of the hand, and William Hutton was off at a brisk pace along Warser Gate and Bottle Lane, and then there was a halt. His direct way was either past St. Peter's Church or by the Poultry, through the long wedge-shaped Market Place, and out at Chapel Bar. But however deserted the long Market Place and its crosses might be in service-time, it was far too open for a runaway, and the cramped outlet of the Bar Gate was not to be thought of. It held a public-house and loungers. Afraid if he loitered he might be spied by the whipper-in of St. Peter's, and all be lost, he turned to his left, plunged into the shade of the over-hanging houses of Bridlesmith Gate, and so on by devious bye-ways, under garden walls and hedges, there so plentiful, until he freed himself from the town by the woodyard beyond the time-worn bastions of the Bar Gate, on the very top of which flourished a fine garden and a giant sycamore.

He hurried up the hill with many a sidelong glance over his shoulder, lest even his own shadow should be a pursuer, truly thankful

that it was Sunday, and that the labourers excavating the sandstone during the week, to lower the approach to the town from the Derby Road, were not there to observe or arrest his progress. As he went he turned a longing farewell gaze over his right shoulder towards the picturesque shades of Larkdale, where many a summer holiday had been blythely spent; but he never checked his uphill course, never stopped until he had put two good miles between himself and Nottingham.

"I cut a queer figure for Sunday," he said, for the first time pausing to rest on the trunk of a felled tree lying by the wayside.

Picture him, and you will own that he did. A short, sturdily-built, but not over-fed youth of seventeen, in well-worn and shining leather breeches, grey frieze broad-skirted coat with large turnover cuffs, and a deep flap waistcoat of the same material and colour, both of which had seen too long service to bear fit proportion to the wearer, albeit his growth had been stunted. Thick shoes buckled on the instep, and long grey woollen stockings rolled up above his knees, not so much for fashion as to cover the retreat of the leathers. Place an old scratch wig on his head, and an older hat on his wig, with the limp brim down to shade and hide his face. Unfasten one flap of his best hat, and suspend it by the disengaged

loop to a coat button in front of him. Put a stick into his right hand, and fling his bags over his left shoulder like a couple of gigantic sausages, and confess with him he *did* cut a queer figure for Sunday.

CHAPTER III.

HOMELESS.

William had not been nursed in the lap of luxury. His couch on the thick grass among buttercups and clover was softer and fresher than the chaff bed on which he had lain awake the night before. Youth and fatigue are friends to sleep; but pain and agitation are sleep's antagonists, and though his limbs were at rest, his mind was not.

He dozed rather than slept, and woke with a start more than once from terrible dreams. He was being thrashed again, now by his father, then by his uncle, and waked so stiff and sore he thought his dreams reality. Then he dreamed he was in gaol, chained as a felon, and woke with a brow wet with other dews than those of night, scarcely able to realize that the clank of chains in his waking ears was not from fetters on his own limbs, but from clogs on the feet of horses and cattle.

After that came the blessed balm of total oblivion. It was about four in the morning when he was roused by the breath of an in-

quisitive cow upon his cheek, which to him seemed anything but balmy.

He was shivering with cold as well as with pain and hunger, but before he satisfied the latter he laved his face and hands in the clear waters of a rillet that supplied a pool for the cattle. He had been trained to consider cleanliness next to godliness, though it was not a cleanly generation.

To cut his loaf he drew from his breeches' pocket a curious knife. It was of silver, shaped liked a pair of hands in close-clasp, with ruffles at each wrist, and contained three blades, a corkscrew, and a curved instrument called a picker, to remove stones from horses' shoes. At some time or other it had evidently been gilt, and engraved upon one ruffle was a setting sun and the letters P.W.

As he opened the large blade he said, "Mr. Webb's knife comes in handy." Then followed the troubled thought, "I hope he won't think because I stole the two shillings, that I ran off with his knife on purpose. He gave me strict charge to take care of it when he left it with me to mend my pens. He will not know that I had forgotten it when I ran off, and aunt is sure to make the worst of me. I would rather have torn the bread with my teeth than have robbed the old gentleman of what he prized so much."

Breakfast washed down with water and seasoned with such thoughts could not be cheery. He hurried the remains into his bag, then sought a safe hiding place for his worldly possessions. This he found amongst luxuriant ferns and weeds at the foot of a fine willow which overhung the little rill in one corner of the close, and he stowed away his bags, so gloomily intent on catching his brother Sam on his way to the silk mill before five o'clock, that the birds in the tree sang their matins unheard.

The town he hurried through so dolefully on his way to Werburgh Bridge, over which lay little Sam's only path to the mill, was by no means the town of this day, or of this century.

Lombe's silk mill was the only one in Derby, had only another rival in all England, and its tragic establishment was fresh in the minds of the people. Derby china was then unknown, the china-works were not built, and many a manufactory since famous, was not even a dream of the future.

From extreme north to south, following the river line, the town did not cover a mile of ground, nor half of a mile westwards from the Derwent, its eastern limit. St. Mary's ornamental bridge sufficed for its traffic with villages and towns beyond the river, and yet

so cramped was its high-pitched roadway that two vehicles could not pass at once. What matter? The need was not.

Little is left but ancient names and inscriptions of either churches or other public buildings. Decay, the fiery fingers of flame, the insidious sapping and mining of the treacherous Markeaton brook have all done the destroyer's work. But when the ruthless scythe of Time has mowed down, the wand of Progress has upbuilt and transfigured since that Monday morn.

But *then*, All Saints' remarkable tower rose high above the church, a landmark to the traveller from afar, and looked out on living poplars and willows where now rise tall spires and chimneys, on meadows and cornfields, gardens and shrubberies, where now spread streets and villas. Looked down, too, on narrow streets where quaint timbered houses preponderated, over-hanging the darkened pathways and nodding to each other, and on dwellings and almshouses, yet rejoicing in primitive roofs of thatch. Looked down also on the meandering Markeaton brook, on its many plank-bridges, impassable during floods, and on the Gaol William passed so nervously, built over the stream, rotting to decay and threatening to fall therein and so cleanse its own foulness.

The youth (whose conscious fears pointed to this gaol as his possible doom) had been provided by the monkish builders of St. Werburgh with a solid if narrow bridge of stone on which he could wait the fateful coming of his brother, and fill up the interval as best he might.

Early as was the hour, labouring people were astir. Afraid of recognition, he leaned with his elbows on the parapet, and looked down into the water.

"I hope I am not like this brook," thought he, "hurrying out of the dim daylight into the dark shadow of this arch, and under ugly houses, to the darker shadows of the gaol."

As he shuddered at the omen he turned round; his little brother, nearly ten years younger than himself, was close upon him, and looked up in vacant astonishment, without a word.

"Sam," said he, much as if he had conned his lesson, "Uncle and me have had some words. He took a stick to me, and beat me like a brute. I have left him, and don't mean to go back. So be sure and give my love to father and to sister Catherine, whenever you see her, and say I have gone away to Ireland, and that they may never see me any more."

The little fellow regarded him with a sort of dazed stupidity, but uttered never a sylla-

ble, not even when William took him by the hand and said "Good-bye."

"You'll be late at th' mill!" cried some lad scurrying past, and after him darted Sam, alive to his own responsibilities as a piecer, if not as a brother.

Here was another shock.

"Sam might have been afraid of me," murmured William, as he followed him with his eyes. "A rare welcome home this. I *have* run into darkness like the brook! But I must not stay here or worse may come," and off he set to regain his bags.

The birds were singing in the trees, the sky was all aglow with crimson and gold when he reached his leafy chamber. In shouldering his bags he looked up.

"I've the world before me now," he said to himself, "but I won't be daunted. There is the sun shining overhead, I'm young and hearty, and if the brook does run into darkness for awhile it is bright enough when it reaches the river."

In that frame of mind he left the town before half its inhabitants had quitted their beds, and ere noon had put eight and twenty miles between himself and Nottingham, though he had had several times to stand aside, warned by the tinkle of a coming bell, and wait in some convenient nook whilst a string

of pack-horses, laden with crates of coal or delf, went by and blocked the narrow roadway.

Once within another county he knew he was safe from the constables of Derby or Nottingham, and slackened speed at Burton-upon-Trent.

The sun was ruddying the evening sky behind him when the spires of Litchfield cathedral were lit up before him with the dying glow. With no foreboding of coming disaster he turned into a wayside field, where a large barn seemed to promise gratuitous lodging. Yet there misfortune found him. For the last time he regaled on his rapidly decreasing loaf. Then leaving his bags and his best hat confidingly under the close green hedge where he had supped, he made the circuit of the large barn to discover a possible inlet, but the door was closed against him.

"I don't relish another night on the grass, and I've no pence to spare for lodgings in the city," said he, moodily, as he went back disappointed to the hedge-corner.

Up he flung his arms in horror. His bags and hat were gone!

Like one frantic he ran out into the road, flinging his arms about wildly, looking hither and thither, and shouting like a madman,

"Thieves! Thieves! Bring them back!

They've stole my bags! Thieves! Bring them back! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

No thief was visible, and no bags, shout and run whither he would.

Labouring men wending homewards stopped to ask "Whaat's oop?"

They were answered incoherently. Some helped him to search fields and bye-paths; but the most compassionate left him to his loss when darkness gave advantage to the thief, and warned them to seek their suppers and their beds.

He had had his supper such as it was. Where was his wretchedness to find a bed?

Alone with his despair he stood that night in Litchfield Market Place, under the shining stars, with only a butcher's hard block whereon to rest his aching head, his blistered feet.

He was weary, but sleep came not. He lay there mournfully tracing back his misery and his misfortunes to the two shillings he had stolen; and beyond that theft to the cutting words of Dolly.

"If I had not found that cursed money, I could not have run away, and but for her I should not have attempted. If I had not taken those two shillings no rascally thief would have had the chance to steal my clothes. Oh! Why was temptation put in my

way ; why did I yield to it like a weak fool? Was it worth while to make myself a vagabond for *her?*"

No answer came to his inner questioning, no relief to his mental agony. The light of dawn was only darkness to him, overwhelmed by the consequences of his own act.

He stood there vacantly watching the opening of the shop, where Samuel Johnson had been born, stood full only of self-pity, not knowing what to do, or whither he should turn.

In the urgency of hunger he accosted a sleek well-to-do individual on a doorstep, whose tooth-pick told of an early breakfast. If he had any hope to feast on the débris of the banquet seen through a window he was disappointed. The gentleman was only "very sorry, very sorry," thought "the case most distressing," and gave him—*advice.* "If you are in want of work you had better follow yonder people to Walsall. It is market day. There you may be successful."

With a heavy sigh William took all he gave, followed the market people, broke his fast on a couple of carrots from a farmer's cart, for which he paid a halfpenny, and worn out with the rugged and trackless road, over waste and common to the little hard-ware town, found himself, during the forenoon in

Walsall, where the elevated parish church looked down upon him.

Full of his woes he poured them forth to move compassion. A butcher gave him a scrap of fat to anoint his blistered feet. Then a man selling stockings at a stall in the Market Place counselled him to seek work in Birmingham, Coventry, or Worcester, volunteering a recommendation to an acquaintance in the first of these places.

The pain in his heart must have overcome the pain of his feet, for he set his face towards Birmingham with resolute determination. "It's only about nine mile more," said he, "I'd think naught o' that if my feet wasn't so bad, and may be I'll see a turnip field bye-and-by."

A weary sigh pointed the sentence, nevertheless he trod the miles down one by one through a country of coalpits and open forges, where smutty women, stripped to the waist, wielded the hammer at the anvil alongside the men, and struck him dumb with the sight. But he found that the region produced more hard nails than succulent turnips, and was not sorry when he had left the smithy land behind.

Gradually the country grew fairer and fresher as he limped along; through wayside smithies, alternated with farms and highly

cultivated land, and the desiderated turnip field turned up long ere he neared a warrener's lonely abode on Handsworth Heath. Indeed, to that may be due the fact that, as he stood among the golden blossomed gorse on the verge of the heath, more homeless than the rabbits scuttering to their burrows at his approach, the town he beheld from his elevation bore so fair an aspect.

With his hunger appeased the grass was greener beneath his feet, the sky was clearer and bluer overhead, and as he left the warrener's lone hut behind and looked across an expanse of verdant fields and trees, the afternoon sun burnished the windows and cupola of St. Philip's, and attracted his admiring gaze to the noble church standing on an eminence alone in all its fresh architectural beauty amid a broad belt of foliage. He looked beyond it to the tall edifices partially enclosing the green churchyard and on good buildings everywhere. And as the sun shone on red-tiled roofs he bethought him that he saw no signs of thatch, and none of the wretched hovels he found on the outskirts of other towns.

He fell in love with the place before he set a foot therein. But he had no prescience to suggest what Birmingham would be to William Hutton, or what William Hutton

would be to Birmingham, or how the spot whereon he stood would be hallowed by the genius of great men whose noble friendship he would share. Newhall and its pool lay sleeping at his feet, but no breeze had a whisper of Boulton and Watt, or world-famed Soho. Descending the long steep hill for about a quarter of a mile (bricks have blossomed on the heath instead of gorse for many and many a long year) and crossing the Hockley bourne, or brook, past cottages and the last batch of nail shops, the scattered houses of Snow Hill began to arise on his left, then on either side, and as he went he was struck with the purposeful activity of the people who passed or met him. All seemed to have some business on hand, and he had entered Bull Street before he had summoned resolution to stop one of the busy throng.

"May it please you, sir, to tell me where I shall find one Mr. Evans, a stockinger, of this town?"

There was no scratching of the head to awaken sleepy intelligence. The respectable young fellow he accosted answered promptly, "What, Evans, the Quaker? Aye, sure. Follow me, and I'll show you. But you limp. Have you walked far?"

"From Derby, sir, since yestermorn. I'm a stocking-frame knitter seeking work."

"In that case you may well be footsore. If you do not succeed with the one Quaker, I would advise you to try Francis Grace. He too is a Quaker, and comes from Derby. He may give you a fair hearing. His shop is in the old Gateway at the end of New Street. You cannot miss it if you keep along Bull Street and High Town as straight as you can go. There's the other Quaker's. Good afternoon."

The brisk young fellow was gone before William could well thank him, but not before he had printed form and features on a retentive memory.

A two-gabled black and white building, with a door between two bay windows, and an ascent of three or four well-worn steps was all that William saw as he stepped across, fearing as much as hoping.

Doffing his hat he said to the grave Mr. Evans, with suitable humility,

"I am a frame-knitter out of work, sir; can you employ me?"

"Thou art a 'prentice!" was the only response.

"No, sir, I am not. I come with the recommendation of your friend, Mr. Jonas Smith, of Walsall."

The keen eyes of the Quaker were not to be blinded. "Go about thy business, I tell thee,

thou'rt a runaway 'prentice," was his stern rejoinder.

With the dread of the House of Correction before his eyes, William stumbled down the steps, wondering where his business lay, and if he had any in life.

To Mr. Grace, who knew his friends in Derby, he was afraid to go. He asked his way to a Mr. Holmes, in Dale End, also named by the Walsall man. Thence he was still more curtly dismissed. A penny was put into his hand, with a "Take that and let's be shut of thee." He was clearly taken for a beggar.

The day was speeding, and he was not. He turned back, found the Gateway, a curious old building, once the ancient Leather Hall, which blocked the entrance into New Street, where a golden stocking hung out as a sign.

He trembled in every limb as he crossed the threshold, and addressed the master of the shop.

"Sir, I am a poor frame-knitter out of work. Can you give me employment?"

"Out of work, eh? Where dost' come from?"

"Derby," was the reply.

"Derby, eh? Then thee'll know my brother?"

"Yes, sir," very timidly spoken.

"When did thee see him last?"

"A week ago, sir," hazarded Will, to whom falsehood was becoming familiar.

"When didst say thou left Derby?"

"On Monday morning, sir."

"Where was my brother when thou saw him?"

"In Iron Gate, sir."

"Come to the light young man," said Francis Grace sternly, catching him by the collar and dragging him to the door. "If my eyes and ears may be trusted, thou art Bill Hutton's son, and have run away from thy good uncle in Nottingham. My brother hath not been out of his bed for more than a month, thou vagabond. Pack off back to thy uncle, and be thankful I let thee go for the sake of those thou belongest to. I'd half a mind to clap thee in gaol for the lies thou hast told. I'll have no runaway 'prentices here."

"Oh, sir!" cried William, clasping his hands imploringly. "Do have pity! I've been robbed of my bags and all I had in the world. Do take me and try me, sir."

He stood there in the doorway, a trembling culprit pleading for compassion from an angry man, and turned away dismissed, heartbroken, and homeless.

He could see nothing in that shop but a stony face, and neither Francis Grace nor he had any inkling that the threads of their lives

would ever be knitted up together in the web of the future.

Nor had the poor half-famished youth, who dragged his weary and excoriated feet over the rough stones towards the Old Cross in the Bull Ring, a very suspicion as he sat down despondingly on its low flat stone step that the room above its open arches was the Court House, or he would have fled the spot in terror.

The outcast had found a prophetic resting place, but he knew it not.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RUNAWAY'S RETURN.

Birmingham at that time boasted two market crosses, somewhat similar in construction, the one known as the Welsh Cross, a little below the fork of Bull Street and Dale End, and the other, or Old Cross, at the upper end of the Bull Ring or Market Place. It is probable that they occupied the sites of veritable stone crosses of ancient date, and that the Welsh Cross had originally commemorated some war-like irruption of that fiery people. But when desponding William Hutton seated himself on the low step of the Old Cross, it was merely a square building pierced by a pair of archways on every side, and with three windows above these to light a chamber over all. A handsome octagonal bell-tower, surrounded by iron rails, adorned the four-sided roof. This was surmounted by a gilt vane to tell the market people how the wind blew, whilst a clock above the southern front proclaimed how time was speeding on.

In this Old Cross the farmers' wives and

daughters were supposed to sell their butter and poultry under cover, whilst the open area of the Bull Ring (surrounded as it was with quaint irregularly constructed shops, indicated by symbolic signs) held not only the shambles, the bull-stake, the corn market, but open stalls for all sorts of wares, whilst dealers in hardware and crockery spread their goods out on the ground, both in the Corn Cheaping and Spicer Street to the left and to the right of St. Martin's parish church at the foot of the hill, a church to be imagined from its visible spire, a troop of houses huddled round the graveyard having shut the old church itself out of sight.

Nothing of this was apparent to William Hutton as he sat with his elbow on his knee and his head on his hand, the very picture of abject misery, whilst people went past on their own business, and took no note of him. He heard the clock overhead strike seven, and counted the strokes mechanically; and it seemed to impress him hazily that workshops must be closing, there seemed so many more people about, all of whom had somewhere to go and something to expect. As for himself he had ceased to expect or to hope.

He was seated on the north side of the cross, with his mournful face turned westwards. Presently he became conscious that two work-

ing men wearing leather aprons had stopped at the corner of Philip Street, and he had an uneasy sense of their close scrutiny.

They crossed the roadway to him.

"You seem by your melancholy situation and your dusty shoes," said one, "a forlorn traveller, without money, and without friends."

The remainder of his two shillings must have been overlooked, or truth have grown an incumbrance, for he answered with a long drawn sigh,

"That's exactly what I am. Just. I'm footsore with walking in search of work. No one will employ me. And I have been robbed of all I had in the world on the road."

"Well, my boy," said the man, "I know what it is to be distressed. If you choose to accept a pint it is heartily at your service."

William's eye lighted. To his despair they seemed the kindest words he had heard since he left Nottingham.

"I shall receive any favour with thankfulness" he replied, as he rose stiffly to his feet.

At a public-house called the Bell, in Philip Street, his compassionate entertainers set bread and cheese and ale before him, saying cheerily, "Fall to and help thyself."

He obeyed them to the full, they watching him in apparent enjoyment of his feast, through memories of their own hungry experience

The men, who said they worked for Simon Onions, the bellowsmaker in Digbeth, afterwards showed him where, for three halfpence, which they gave him, he could have a bed for the night. Then they separated with many thanks from him and hearty good wishes from them in so hopeful a tone that he took heart, and rose in the morning fresher and brighter from the contact, though he had been wakened over early by the unaccustomed clink and clank of hammers everywhere.

At nine o'clock on the Saturday evening, William Hutton stood once more on the threshold of his father's home in Derby, a suppliant for intercession with his uncle. He had spent a day exploring Birmingham, keeping clear of the three stockingers. Had walked on to Coventry, to Nuneaton, to Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and in all places been received as a runaway apprentice, and threatened with gaol. A bed in a hay-loft, water from fresh springs, cherries at a halfpenny a pound, turnips from the field, these had sufficed for his frugal needs, and he had sixpence left when he told the tale of his uncle's cruelty, his own flight with the stolen two shillings, the loss of his clothes, his wanderings and his hardships to his attentive and sorrowful father.

He, William Hutton the elder, was a woolcomber, once in business for himself; but losses, failure, followed by poverty and the death of a good wife, had led him to make matters worse by seeking a refuge from his cares in the ale-barrel.

He was fairly sober that night, and glad to receive the son he had supposed on the way to Ireland. But though he promised to send to Nottingham in the morning for his brother George, and listened to the runaway's tale with moist eyes, in the morning —although he had kept his word—he was in another frame of mind.

"Look thee, Will," he said; "if we Huttons have been unfortunate, and poor as church mice, we have been truthful and honest; and thou hast brought such disgrace on our name with this theft of thine (oh, that son of mine should touch what was not his own!) that I shall be ashamed to face my brother. I shall feel the disgrace the longest day I live. Nay, I could hardly feel it worse if thou wert in gaol, as many a better lad hath been for less. And there's no knowing how George may take it."

The father sat despondingly on a rush-bottomed chair, with his hands clasped on his knees as he spoke; the bare room, where the plaster was falling from the walls (in

token of a future fall altogether into the brook) reeked with the fumes of stale tobacco-smoke and ale, and the son, leaning against the open casement for a breath of fresh air in an attitude not less desponding, answered penitently enough,

"I own I was wrong to take the money, father, but I was cruelly tried (he had said nothing about Dolly), and I am sorry to see you take it so sorely to heart. But I'm not so much afraid of Uncle as of Aunt Ann. Uncle would be kind enough if she did not work him up into a passion with hints and insinuations. He was inclined to make peace when I was fool enough to run away. And I dare say as I have come back voluntarily he may overlook it, if you only put in a word for me. He will be glad to get his best worker back. I am sure he would feel my loss, and I'll work up the money I took. I've repented the taking ever since, and never spent a farthing without a pang. If I'd taken the whole ten shillings they'd not have blistered my fingers worse." But there was not so much repentance in his tone as a sense of the suffering he had endured for so little.

"Repentance is a good sign, if it's the right sort, Will. And it's well thou didn't take all. Thy uncle may perhaps overlook it on that score, but I'd not have thee too sanguine. A

'prentice who runs off and robs his master needn't look for too much favour; and to my mind thou'rt too much stuck up in thy own conceit, after all thou'st done to shame an honest name."

"I wish Catherine was here," William put in hastily, "she would have some compassion on me, and influence with Uncle George, and not make me seem blacker than I am."

"Then Catherine can't be here. She's at her old place in the minister's family still, and doing her duty. However, I'll step out and ask John Harpur and Jarvis Bennett to come and talk George over. His old friends will have more influence than me. And don't show thy face in Derby streets till he doth come."

It was easier to nod acquiescence than to obey. William, in his spirit of unrest and disquiet, found it impossible to sit still and wait in that stifling miserable room.

His week's tramp had set its marks on his apparel, none too good to start with, and worn his shoes into trashes.

Personal vanity sent him out of the town, not into it, though leave the reeking house he did.

He was speedily beyond the town, and following the course of the meandering brook through flowery ways, now longing for his

sister Catherine, so strong and reliable, now dreading his uncle's reception, sauntered carelessly along lost in abstraction.

Presently his eye was arrested by a golden-headed fairy-like figure in a dark blue frock and tippet tripping before him over the grass at a safe distance from the stream. She was swinging her hat by the strings as she skipped along gaily, as light of heart as of form.

"That's a happy little creature," thought William with a sigh for contrast. "I wasn't so lightsome at her age. Who can she belong to, I wonder?"

As he wondered a sudden puff of wind caught the hat and sent it whirling out of her hand, and bowling away on its edge as if inclined for a race, or a launch on the brook.

She turned to chase it, crying "Oh, my hat!" but had not William been there to intercept its course, she might have been "left lamenting" like the maiden in the ballad.

As she dropped a demure courtesy and thanked him shyly, he thought she was the prettiest and politest child of her years (he took her for nine or ten) that he had ever seen.

"Oh, thank you, sir. It's my best hat. Grandmother would have been so vexed if I had lost it."

"Yes, hats cost money," said he, wondering what had become of *his* best hat, and when he should get a new one.

"So Grandmother saith. I only wear mine on Sundays. I have a hood for the week. She will chide me for taking it off."

"Then why did you? Little girls should do as they are told," said William with the air of a mentor.

"Oh, it is stiff and uncomfortable, and I was hot," she answered, adding gravely, "Do you always do as you are told?"

Before he could reply a voice came over a farmhouse gate, from an elderly dame in a prim cap and dress of grey tabinet.

"Sally Cox! Hast thee forgotten what day it is? Come in directly and read thy psalm."

"Oh, there's grandmother," cried the child, and was off with a run.

He continued his stroll past the Markeaton farm, thinking to himself, "Why, there's farmer Grace's wife! It's odd I should chance to come this way and see her. Grace, indeed! there was very little grace in her son's treatment of me last Tuesday. I never want to see any of them again. *She's* not over gracious either."

He had heard the old quakeress say to the child as she opened the gate, "Thee should not talk to ill-dressed strangers by the way-

side. Wanted that young man aught? Was he begging? He seemeth like a thriftless idler."

"Nay, grandmother, he was civil as a gentleman. My hat blew away, and would have gone into the water, but he caught it for me. I only thanked him, and——" the little apologist entered the house, and the remainder of her speech was lost.

But if the grandmother's suggestion that he looked like "a beggar" and "a thriftless idler" had stung him, there was healing balsam in the little maiden's reply that he was "civil as a gentleman."

He did not forget it or the golden head he saw bent sedately over a book by the bay window on his way back, though years went by before he saw the golden head again.

George Hutton must have lost no time after receiving his brother's message, and must have thought the occasion warranted Sunday travelling, for about nine in the evening he walked into the house, booted and spurred, having left his horse at the Three Crowns, by the bridge.

The friends, who were to have acted as mediators, wisely stayed away.

The two brothers, who seldom met, who had alike sorrowed, and whose affection had not died out, clasped hands, and looked at each other through tearful eyes.

The action was at once solemn and tender. Before a word was spoken, the runaway knew he was forgiven.

There was no mistaking for genuine anger the tone in which George Hutton asked his faulty nephew, "Are not you to blame?" as his first salutation, before the clasped hands parted. It was clear he had taken himself to task for undue severity and held himself in part answerable for the result.

William hung his head and was silent, a conflict of feelings and emotions—surprise, contrition, gratitude, self-abasement—laid an embargo on his tongue and forbade utterance. He had always considered his uncle kind at heart, though subject to gusts of passion; now he felt that he was benign.

He had dreaded his coming as a precursor of fresh punishment. There were not even reproaches.

What marvel that the unforgotten beating was scored against the hypocritical aunt as the instigator, when he found his uncle thus.

No doubt George Hutton was glad to get his best apprentice back. At all events he sat down on one of the two rush-bottomed chairs as if thankful that a disagreeable business was over. Then he said that riding had given him an appetite, he was glad to see the bread and cheese upon the table, and

would help himself, and after a pull at a mug of ale, harmony was established.

He talked of the rise in the price of provisions that year, of the slackness of trade, of his loss by an absconding debtor; made inquiries into his brother's circumstances, the terms on which Samuel was working at the silk mill, the welfare of his niece Catherine; made a favourable report of Thomas, who was, he said, "slow but sure, and easy-going," of anything, in short, but William and his doings. It was not until his supper was over, and Sam (who had sat on a wooden stool by the fireplace listening with mouth agape) was sent to his bed on a sack under the stairs, that the subject was introduced.

Then the father, preparing to smoke the calumet of peace, laid on the table a couple of long clay pipes, a tin box of tobacco, and a fresh mug of ale. Pipes were filled, and without waiting to be questioned he told the story of the runaway's adventures as it had been told to him, dwelling much on the loss of his good clothes, his privations, and his frugal economising of the stolen two shillings, of which he had brought sixpence back. Of his inability to obtain employment he said little.

Once or twice during the recital, William, who had drawn his stool into the background,

caught the echo of a faint "Poor lad!" between the whiffs of his uncle's pipe, and that gave another complexion to the open remark.

"Well, he got only his deserts. I hope it will be a lesson to last his lifetime. His own rod whipped him worse than my stick; so we'll say no more about it, or the stolen money. It was because he had the chance of taking ten shillings and only took two, that his aunt and me consented to take him back and overlook it."

William, gratefully thankful for this full forgiveness, wondered that Mr. Webb's knife was not even referred to; but it had not suited George Hutton to say how strong an intercessor Mr. Webb had been with the young man's unrelenting aunt, and he remained in ignorance.

On the other hand, William kept his own counsel respecting Dolly Parker, and left aunt and uncle both to infer that only the violence of the latter had driven him away.

"I reckon that's thy best suit now, Bill," said his uncle in the morning, as they were about to depart for Nottingham.

A mournful shake of the head was the sole response.

"Well, thou can neither show thy face at meeting or among the lasses in that plight. I'll tell thee what I'll do, William," turning to

the woolcomber, who was setting his wool and comb-pot in order, "I'll go halves towards a fresh suit for him if thou'll be the other half."

"That I will," said the father, well pleased at his brother's spontaneous generosity. "Shake hands upon it."

And a shake of the hand ratified the agreement, as it also served for farewell.

But Mrs. George had a word to say on the subject, as on other matters, and no clothes were forthcoming.

"So, young man," was her first salutation, "you have discovered that 'the way of transgressors is hard.' I hope you have come back penitent, and grateful for pardon. The Scripture saith 'Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good.' Prithee, take that to heart and remember it."

She took care that he should remember; and he was not disposed to forget. He felt his position keenly. Roper smirked and almost drove him to desperation. He could not show himself amongst his acquaintances for lack of seemly raiment. He felt he had sunk in the estimation of others as well as in his own; and whatever of spirit or energy he possessed would have been quenched had he not found a friend in the house in the person of old Mr. Webb.

He had accepted William's apology for the accidental carrying away of his knife without the faintest show of doubt or suspicion. Indeed, before the assembled household he said, "Well, Will, I'm glad to have my knife back. I knew you had forgotten it was in your pocket. You are welcome to mend your pens with it at any time; and when I die you shall have it as a keepsake."

"A keepsake forsooth, it's little of keepsakes he deserves," quoth Mrs. Hutton, and there the subject dropped.

Mr. Webb had made a promise, little suspecting all it would import in time to come.

CHAPTER V.

MR. WEBB.

At one period of William Hutton's life an old school-mistress who had fallen on evil days went to lodge under the poor roof of his father, with the remark that "none of them would be the worse for her coming." And seeing that her good manners corrected their rough ones, and that her stores of knowledge were attractively open, and that she contrived to inspire the ignorant young people, William especially, with a craving for book-lore, and as she also taught them the use of the pen, she might have been considered a profitable lodger, however little she paid in coin of the realm.

Another lodger, under another roof, in another county, had taken up unwittingly the charmed wand which she had dropped from her pulseless fingers years before, and he was known as Mr. Peter Webb.

He was an elderly gentleman, about whom hung a slight flavour of mystery, he said so little of himself or his private affairs, and

nothing of his family or connections. He was supposed to be in reduced circumstances from the rustiness of his invariable suit of black, and his unmurmuring adoption of a style of living evidently below his proper rank and condition.

He had been lodging with George Hutton for about two years previously to William's escapade. At intervals during that period he had gone away—he never said whither—for three or four days at a time. It was imagined that he went to recruit his supplies; but how, or from what source, was equally unknown; but he was so frugal, made so little display of money, that it was conjectured his means were scanty. He had a keen eye, a slightly aquiline nose, and a well-formed face, but the expression was grave and subdued. His eyebrows were white as snow, his forehead was deeply lined, and his tall form was slowly bending at the shoulders, but whether with the burden of care or of years could not be determined.

It was whispered here and there that he was a Jacobite in hiding and had another name besides Webb; and that his threadbare black suit, his black buckles, and his black hose were worn in mourning for the Stuarts; but if the echoes reached his ears, he only smiled and said nothing.

He was, however, a man of culture and

travel far from common; had a ready fund of ideas and information derived from actual observation as well as study, and his society was courted by Dr. Deering and other men of intelligence and status in the town, who were content to sit down in the common room at the Hutton's to converse with him. When such conversations took place after business hours, William was ever an attentive listener, and this had caused the observant old gentleman to take especial notice of him, and to foster the youth's craving for knowledge. It was he who set him writing copies to improve his calligraphy, taught him to make and mend his own quill pens, and gave him occasional lessons in cyphering, which he in turn imparted to placid Thomas; Mrs. George the while regarding these efforts at education as so much "waste of time," only to be tolerated as keeping the lads quiet and out of mischief.

At the time of the thrashing Mr. Webb was away on his periodic business, whatever it might be, or he would surely have interfered. And Will was indebted to him for pardon and reinstatement more than he supposed.

The old gentleman was quick to perceive Joseph Roper's disposition to taunt and tantalize the runaway, with Mrs. Hutton's tacit acquiescence, and manœuvered to prevent it as far as possible.

He sat on the warm Wednesday forenoon by the wide window of the big house-place in a cornerwise arm-chair, on the back of which hung his scratch wig, with a cooler bandana handkerchief drooping lightly over his bald head. He was reading, as was his wont, his favourite "Universal Magazine," whilst Mrs. Hutton, who wore a long check apron to protect her self-coloured linen gown, and had a plain linen cap on her head, went about her domestic work with a sharp nicety well in accord with the spotless white of the plaster floor, and the whiteness of the wooden platters and bowls on a dresser as white. It was her baking day, and she was extra busy; too busy for much conversation.

All at once, after a fit of coughing which had caused him to lay down the magazine on his lap, he began,

"Pray, Mrs. Hutton, could you let Will sleep in my room now he has come back? I am getting feeble, and should be glad to have a good strong arm to lift me up on my pillow when my cough troubles me in the night-time."

Prim and speckless Mrs. Hutton looked up from the dough she was kneading in an earthenware pan on the floor, and shot a sharp glance of inquiry from her black beady eyes across the hearth to the figure in the arm-chair, as she said suggestively,

"Roper's stronger than Will."

"Aye, and rougher," was the quick rejoinder; "I'd prefer Will." And here his voice sank confidentially low, as he observed a gathering cloud on her brow, "It may be well to keep a sharp eye on the young man for awhile. Evil communications, you know,—" and he finished the incomplete sentence with a comprehensive nod, leaving the kneeling bread-maker to her own interpretation.

"Ah, well," said she, "he might be for teaching the others the same trick, or be for setting off again himself. And so, if you don't mind being troubled with the young runagate, it may be a good thing for him and for the others too. And maybe a few sharp words of reproof for his wickedness would have more weight from you than from me, sir, or his uncle either. I'm sure he wants a good talking too, for I've heard there's some Godless wench he follows about—so if you would only——"

This device had succeeded. Putting her own interpretation on his suggestion of "evil communication," she was as eager to second his wishes as she would have been to oppose had she understood.

"Never fear, Mrs. Hutton, I'll give him a good talking to when I've got him snug in my own room."

And so he did, but not as she anticipated.

Bed-time came, the lads had said "good-night," taken off their shoes, and were retreating. "Stay, Will," cried his aunt in her sharp, quick tones. "Here, carry Mr. Webb's rushlight for him, and don't drop the grease on the floor, you are going to sleep in Mr. Webb's room now. And if he wants anything in the night be sure you jump up and get it."

"Thank you, aunt, aye, that I will," was the brisk and ready response of the "runagate," as, well pleased at the instruction, he held out his hand for the iron candlestick in which was the long thin rushlight.

"Whew!" half whistled Roper, "What's in the wind now?" Giving a jog to William's elbow in passing, which nearly extinguished the faint light, and spotted the immaculate floor with tallow (for which Will was taken to task the next day), he said in jeering under-tones, "I wish you joy of the change."

"And so do I, Will," supplemented Thomas in a very different spirit, "you'll be more comfortable," a remark which drew on him a propeller from Roper's fist as they went upstairs in the dark. Will's "Aye, that I shall!" had reached the ear of both.

People at that time were not so luxuriously housed as at present. Their wants were fewer; their habits simpler.

Mr. Webb's room was nothing more than the front attic in the high-pitched gable of the old beam and plaster dwelling; the lads occupied the back one, and between the two low doorways lay a space open to the staircase, containing a closet in which George Hutton kept his small store of worsted and woollen yarn. The best parlour and bedroom occupied the floor below, over the work-room and house-place, the latter just a better sort of kitchen, having a lean-to supplement at the back up a couple of steps, where the rough housework was done. It must be added that the front parlour slightly overhung the work-room, and the projection had the outer support of two wooden pillars, the barked trunks of young trees.

If the rooms were few they were not small, so that even the attics, narrowed by the slope of the roof, were not particularly cramped, and, like every other part of the house, they were scrupulously clean. Indeed, never an outdoor shoe or boot was allowed to mount those well-scrubbed oaken stairs, or tread the upper floors; the lodger had slippers, the lads their stocking-feet.

The floors, dark with age, were bare, save that by the side of the old gentleman's stump bedstead was laid a strip of flossy rug, home-made, with pack thread and waste ends of wool

knitted together. A well-washed linen curtain of red and yellow check hung at the bed-head to screen the occupant from draughts. A table and chair stood beneath the window, a Staffordshire bowl and ewer of water had place thereon, and a looking-glass about a span wide hung on a nail by the window. There were a few prints on the walls, and a shelf of books.

Will found that his chaff bed had been mounted on a pallet alongside the other bed, and felt it in some sort promotion.

Thinking it over in silence as he helped to remove the rusty black coat from the bent shoulders, which, more than his furrowed face, added years to Mr. Webb's actual age, he ejaculated as if involuntarily—

"It is all past understanding!"

"What is, my lad?" queried the elder.

"Oh, many things."

"Perhaps I could help you to an understanding, if you would explain," said the old man, turning his grave face kindly to the new attendant.

"Well, sir, you know I was thrashed because I told the truth. I stole two shillings and was commended because I did not steal ten. Whilst I kept steadily at work, and did my duty, I had my bed on the floor with the rest. I ran away, caused loss and trouble to my uncle. He who had beaten me took me

back without an angry word. Aunt Ann received me with cutting reproofs, and now she has promoted me to your room and a comfortable bed. It seems as if bad conduct was more in favour than good. I don't comprehend."

Mr. Webb smiled. He had listened in silence to the end. Then sitting down on his bedside he said impressively—

"You argue falsely, young man. You were not punished for the *truth* you uttered, but for disobedience, idleness, and supposed bravado. You were not commended for stealing, but for *resisting the temptation* to steal *more* when the opportunity was there. Your uncle's anger soon evaporates. As I take it, he thrashed you as a duty, to correct serious faults of character, and overdid it, as angry men are apt to do" (said with a heavy sigh). "You were forgiven, not for your misdeeds, but in spite of them, because, like the prodigal son, you came back voluntarily and penitent, and your uncle, like a true Christian, in condemning his own harshness, became lenient towards your rashness. Remember this, William, for angry men rarely blame themselves for consequences, as I know too well."

"Oh, sir, I don't so much blame Uncle George as my Aunt. I understand him better than her. I owe her a grudge for my sore

bones. If she didn't egg uncle on, she never asked him to desist. And why she should be so hard to me and cross ever since I came back, and suddenly give me a better bed, and in your room, is a hard nut to crack."

"Suppose I help you to the kernel," and again the old man smiled. "You and Roper are not good friends. No doubt there is some young lass in the case." (William reddened to the top of his crown.) "Ah! I see I am right; we'll talk about her another time. Well, I thought you two would be best apart, so straightway bespoke your services in my room—and here you are."

William turned to him with grateful eyes. "Oh, sir, how can I thank you? Roper has been the torment of my life. I do not think I should have run away but for him."

"Aye," said Mr. Webb as he rose to his feet, "was it so?" Then with a complete change of countenance he added impressively, "Thank God, young man, that he led you back to your kindred and to the path of duty! There are some runaways who never return, who shut themselves out wilfully from love and home, and all that gladdens existence; who in the blindness of anger and prejudice go forth to a life of loneliness and misery; who repent too late, only to find the gates of the grave barred against restitution. Thank

God, William, on your knees, thank Him humbly that *you* were brought back and *forgiven*. That *you* have a chance to repair the wrong of the past. Remorse and regret are bad bedfellows. And now—good-night!"

His whole frame shook with emotion as he wrung the youth's hand, then hurried into bed, and buried his head in the coverlet, as if to stifle a groan.

William, who had listened in amazed silence, could only murmur, "I *am* thankful, sir;" so greatly was his susceptible nature moved by this exhortation which seemed wrung from the inner man like the outpouring of an overburdened heart.

In something akin to awe he knelt down to pray ere he crept noiselessly into his new resting-place; but either the burning rush-light or what he had heard kept him long awake, and he was conscious that the occupant of the other bed was awake also, or given to moaning in his sleep.

The following morning Mr. Webb appeared lost in thought, and after breakfast said he had some writing to do and must go upstairs to be quiet and undisturbed.

At noon he came down to dinner with the rest, then instead of taking his customary nap went back to his writing, first asking Mr.

Hutton for a small packet of papers he had given to him for safe keeping.

The curious old oak desk in which George Hutton stowed away such things stood on a bureau in the house-place. He unlocked it and took from an inner cavity a sealed packet, which he handed to his lodger, who sighed as he said "Thank you," and went up the stairs followed by Mrs. George's sharp eyes.

There was a clatter as she cleared away the dishers and wooden trenchers, muttering, "Surely the house-place might have served his turn. What has he to write of so vast account that he must cocker himself up in the best room, to put the chairs out of place and take the polish off the table I waxed but on Monday. Marry, but less might serve, gentleman though he be."

Whatever he wrote, it was placed in the packet which was re-sealed with a ring the writer always wore, and at tea-time, when the lads came in for their milk and bread, was again handed over to George Hutton to be replaced by him in the oaken desk, there to be undisturbed—how long?

William discovered in the course of time that in running away he had flown a kite with a considerable tail of consequences.

Before the week was out he was alternately burning and shaking with ague.

Anxious to atone for the past and to repair his own losses he had been working late and early most assiduously, and unwilling to lose an hour stuck to his frame until an extraordinary clatter made by his feet on the treadles attracted his uncle's attention.

He was out of his own frame in an instant —the journeymen and apprentices looking on and passing comments, whilst he helped Will from his seat into the house-place—all kindness.

For a wonder, impassive Thomas was roused to follow at their heels.

"I've brought William to lie down on the settle," said George Hutton to his wife, "he is very ill, and I'm afraid we shall have to send for the apothecary."

Mrs. Hutton carefully putting vegetables into the big black pot suspended by a hook over the fire, dropped in the last turnips with a jerk which splashed her newly-cleaned hearth.

"Ill, indeed! and serve him right! It all comes of his running away, and lying on the wet grass. It's a judgment on him for his wickedness, and so I told him this morning. Prithee, let him have another sup of herb tea, who's going to pay an apothecary for him."

"I will if it be necessary," came quietly from the cornered chair by the window, where sate Mr. Webb; "in my opinion Will requires to be blooded immediately, and Thomas should lose no time in fetching the apothecary."

"I'm very sorry, aunt," faltered Will, seeing her eyes flash up. (His uncle dared not put in a word.)

"Sorry, truly! Marry, you'd need be sorry, seeing the trouble you've made. But ill or well, no apothecary comes here on a Saturday to muck up the place just cleaned. If you want blooding you must go to him. And I think the barber might serve your turn."

Mr. Webb rose, laid his book on the window-ledge.

"You've a strong will, Mistress," said he, as he reached down his hat, "and we bow to it. But there is no will like a good will, and I would rather be the Samaritan than the Levite. Come my lad," to Will. "I'll lend you a weak arm and perhaps Mr. Hutton will lend you another, and we may get you to an apothecary's between us."

"Thomas can go," she jerked out then, "he's strong enough, and his work's not worth much. Hutton can't be off at every turn, these hard times," she added, as she caught a sarcastic curl on Mr. Webb's lips.

Back to the work-room went the master stockinger, who was master there, if not on his own hearth, whilst William, now in a blazing fever, was led away between his brother and his aged friend, leaving Mrs. Hutton to cleanse her spotted hearth, recover her temper, and ponder the old gentleman's last words at her leisure.

He had turned back to say—

"Mistress, when you spoke of a judgment on yon poor lad, did it occur to you that God's judgment is denounced on many secret sins, and that the rash act of a simple lad in fleeing from oppression is not in the category? *I* have felt the judgment of God. Are *you* in no danger of it?"

CHAPTER VI.

PETER WEBB'S PREDICTION.

If there was a feverish flush on William's face when he turned from his uncle's gate, it was white enough when he came out of the apothecary's leaning heavily on his brother Thomas, with his jacket sleeve loose, his arm bandaged up, and a sprinkling of crimson on linen and small-clothes. His veins had been drained to faintness, he was dizzy, and inclined to stumble as he went. He was ill, of that there was no question.

Flaxen-haired Dolly Parker, sitting in the open door-way for the light and the sunshine, with her lace cushion on her lap, flung her bobbins hither and thither with a sure and swift motion, and sang merrily over her work, which still went on, though she sent her eyes roving up and down the road, and nodded or called to neighbours as they passed.

Suddenly the girl, who was only sixteen, caught a glimpse of three figures.

Down went her work, up went her hands; she almost barred their path.

"Why, Bill Hutton, is that thee? I thought it was thy ghost!"

"Aye, it's what's left of me," said Will faintly, with a strange tingling all over him; but not another word, and she stood looking after them with her hands clasped loosely before as her, as if unable to realize what was the matter.

She picked up her cushion, and set to work to rearrange her entangled threads and disordered bobbins. Presently she broke the silence with a light laugh. "Much good he hath done himsen. He's white faced as a wench. Happen they've let some o'th love-sick blood out on him. They'd best stick him up at next Goose Fair an' see who'll bid! It won't be Dolly Parker. G'me a mon wi' spirit to speak his mind to a lass, and stick up for her when he's got her. Roper's worth two on him." And then she sang again, and again the bobbins went flying hither and thither under her deft fingers.

"He'll be for coming keeking and peeping at one through the shutters again now he's back, but Roper says he'll have to get a new hat and coat afore he shows his face after me i' th' daytime." And again the laugh rang out as if it were the merriest jest, this silent homage of an apprentice lad who had not even the grace of good garments.

But weeks went by, the weeks lengthened

into months, the pale face had long resumed its place over the frame by the broad window, and when night shadows fell and the great glass globe suspended from the rafters reflected the lights in iron sconces on the walls the same form might be seen through the unshuttered window with feet and fingers industriously at work, whoever else might be playing, as often as not with a book open on the window-ledge beside him.

Or, so long as the summer lingered, and Mr. Webb and his friends smoked their long clay pipes and discoursed together in the open garden, he might be found leaning against one of the wooden pillars in the shadow of the overhanging building, listening to the words of wisdom which fell from their lips, for Mr. Webb was rarely known to indulge in idle chat, or to discuss politics.

But his foot never lingered before Dolly's door; he was never more caught standing on tiptoe to peer through the heart-shaped apertures in the black shutters, and though he had in some sort renovated his outer garb long before the Goose Fair, he went to meeting, or gave his arm to Mr. Webb in riverside or forest rambles, but he passed pretty Dolly with a nod and nothing more.

It so happened that William's deferential respect towards Mr. Webb, whom he regarded

as the embodiment of historic and topographic lore, had kindled an almost paternal affection in the lonely man's breast, whilst on the other hand his care for the neglected youth's bodily weal as well as his mental, shown especially during his sharp attack of ague, had touched the innermost chords of a sensitive heart.

He treated William henceforth as a son, and he who had so little experience of fatherly care returned it with all a good son's reverence and devotion.

A bond of mutual attachment and, in some sort, confidence was formed, strengthened by sharing the same apartment.

Little thought Mrs. George Hutton, when as a concession to her quiet lodger's age, infirmities, and regular payments, she conceded the right to burn a nightly rushlight, it would serve her undervalued nephew to make acquaintance with the insides of Mr. Webb's few books, as well as of others borrowed for his use by the old gentleman from his friend Dr. Deering.

George Hutton, for a small manufacturer of the period, was not an illiterate man. He was a fair historian, and was not without books, but Mrs. George took care they should not spoil with too much use. She dubbed William a "bookworm" as a reproach, accused him of "wasting time and eyesight in reading;" but

that he should supplement his proper day's labour with an early half hour's study when daylight served, and steal another hour from sleep before midnight was a degree of madness she never suspected.

Her philosophy had not mastered the fact that frame-knitting was to him drudgery, the pursuit of knowledge pure recreation.

As little did Dolly Parker suspect that when she accosted William Hutton on the way from the apothecary's, that she reminded his self-constituted guardian of the "Godless wench," of whom Mrs. Hutton had spoken so slightingly. Or, that before many weeks had gone by, William would leave his book unread whilst under cover of the night shadows, he opened his heart to his sleepless companion, and confiding his infatuation also admitted that Dolly Parker's taunt had done more to drive him away than his uncle's broom-stick; and that he couldn't forget it.

"And pray don't forget it," advised the old man seriously from his pillow. "A young girl who could so exult in the cruel punishment of a fellow-creature must have a hard heart, whatever her beauty, a doubly hard one, if, as you say, she was aware of your dumb admiration. Pretty faces had been the destruction of man before the days of Samson or of Troy. Pluck your boy-love up by

the roots lest it spread like a weed and choke the soil, leaving no place for a fairer flower to grow and flourish. Whenever the pretty face comes before you, or should ever the red lips tempt, recall the coarse unfeeling words those same red lips uttered in mockery of your pain. The recollection may save you from life-long folly and misery."

William sighed behind the hand that shaded his face. "It may be she knows no better."

"Let us charitably set the girl's coarseness and freedom down to ignorance and want of breeding; in short, to her motherlessness as much as to her class and condition. The same excuse will not serve for a stinging tongue." And the speaker ground his teeth as if some old grievance stirred his speech.

"Indeed, sir, it seemed to turn my very heart round in spite of her pretty face," answered Will, with another heavy sigh. "But she is *very* pretty."

"Pretty faces fade, but sharp tongues sharpen with use, and woe to the husband when the wife's tongue is sharpened on a stony or jealous heart. Keep clear of such a woman, William, if she hath the loveliness of Venus. All men have not the gift of patience and forbearance."

"My uncle hath," interjected Will, with a smile.

"Aye, and he keepeth peace thereby!" The young man seated by the table with a book before him saw by the motion of the bedclothes that the speaker shrugged his shoulders, a foreign habit acquired on his travels, and then burst out in another tone, "But what more doth he keep? Doth he keep his own self-respect? His right of will? His own conscience? Doth he even keep his own temper at all times? *You* know that when the natural man is roused, it is like a whirlwind let loose, and sweeps all before it in its blind fury. A quiet man provoked is mad and desperate, as I know to my sorrow."

"You?"

"Aye, aye, my lad; my life was wrecked in a gust of passion roused by a woman's tongue. She loved me well though she had a fiery spirit, and I adored her all the more for that which I lacked. But the day came when a word too much stung me to madness. In my insane exasperation I took an oath, a fearful oath in my soul's despite, that she should never see my face again living or dead. I broke all links, all ties, and oh, my God! the agony of remorse when passion was spent, and only my rash oath remained. What it cost to keep it, or how it was kept I may not tell. But, O! for your soul's sake, Will, never do you take a rash oath. And if you would

be a man and not a mouse keep clear of Dolly Parker. She would drag you to ruin. You were meant for something better."

The old man sank back exhausted on his pillow, as he added,

"Now get to bed. It is too late to read to-night. And set the seal of silence on what you have heard."

"I shall not forget," was the answer.

This partial revelation of Mr. Webb's secret, made as it were to enforce a life lesson, took firm hold of William, and fortified him to avoid temptation in the guise of pretty Dolly. And so it was he kept out of her way through the weeks and months as seasons came and went, and she in passing could hear him singing at his grating frame as blithely as she had sung over her lace cushion, but his songs were oft impromptu rhymes set to old tunes.

The taunts of Roper no longer affected him; nay, they turned in time to blustering reproaches that Will was coming between himself and the lass, then succeeded vituperative anathemas of her and her sex generally, which led to the conclusion that the pair had quarrelled, and that the big blusterer had become jealous of the other when rivalry had really ceased.

The explanation came in time. But before that came about Roper had disappeared.

His ill-humour had caused him from time to time to spoil the stockings in his frame; snapping the worsted with sudden jerks, forgetting to narrow, knitting uneven webs, too loose or too close in patches; thus bringing on himself censure he was ill-disposed to brook.

Mr. Webb had gone away as usual, during the week of the races. As usual he hired a quiet cob at the Blackmoor's Head in Long Row in the early morning, and turning its head out of the Market Place pursued his customary way up what is now Sherwood Street, northward through Thorneywood, a grave old man with lines of care and trouble in the face shaded from the sun or prying eyes by one loosened flap of his three-cornered hat. His black suit, conspicuous among the drabs and browns, blues and greens in ordinary wear, in its rustiness suggested the wearer to be a poor vicar or schoolmaster taking advantage of the holiday season to visit distant friends. How otherwise could the country people coming noisily into the town for the races in parties of eight or ten account for his entering the forest, and—passing the race course on his left with never a glance—turning his back on jollity and merriment, for a solitary ride through the lovely glades and shades of sylvan Sherwood.

In some remote country places people meet-

ing strangers in the lanes and byeways still salute them with a hearty "good day" in passing. Thirty years ago it was a common custom in the north, and farther back still in this century and last rustics did not scruple to accost a stranger with questions anent his destination, business, or the news of the day, meaning no harm, good souls, but merely to fill the vacuum in empty lives.

So one or another race-goer hailed Peter Webb as he jogged along what has been for more than a hundred years the direct highway to Mansfield. It was then little more than a rude track in the sandy soil, worn into deep ruts by the carrier's waggon, an occasional farmer's cart, or the infrequent roll of a travelling carriage to or from Bestwood, Newstead, or other forest mansions, and originally beaten down by the hoofs of packhorses or private travellers' steeds, and by the feet of shepherds and their flocks, foresters, farm labourers, gipsies and other pedestrians into a recognized road, but it was by no means a well-regulated continuous highway even twenty years later. What the byeways striking right and left to manors or villages must have been may be inferred. Here and there individuals for private convenience rid their land of stones turned up by the ploughshare to fill axle-deep ruts and hollows in their own

vicinity, but miles of less frequented road were left to traffic, chance, and the weather. Here the track led through open and verdurous glades where the wild deer stood with bold front to question the intruder, there under the shade of over-arching trees the patriarchs of the woods, then through a ferny brake or bosky thicket, where might lurk bipeds to be dreaded more than the antlered deer. And though poachers and deer-stealers sought their prey by night there were always footpads to be feared by the solitary horseman who had a purse, a watch, or a steed to lose. People bent on honest business commonly sought companionship by the way for protection, and so Peter Webb, travelling alone into the forest, attracted attention.

But whether he was asked if he was bound for Arnold, or Woodborough, or Arnfield, or Calverton, or Worksop, or Mansfield, he simply bowed his head with a courteous "No, friend," without change of feature, or the pace of his steady roadster. Five miles and a half from Nottingham he left the direct track for a bridle path trending towards the north-east, so little frequented that in three or four miles he encountered only a single individual.

This was a remarkably tall young man, tolerably well-dressed in a jaunty rustic suit of bottle-green velveteen, with a falling white

necktie, which, strangely enough for one of his apparent condition, was edged with lace. He carried a stout blackthorn stick in one hand, and with this he beat the bushes right and left, scaring the thrushes and the blackbirds from their nests, and sending leaves and twigs flying and fluttering after them.

At last, as the horseman and he neared each other he sent the knotted stick with a raking sweep through a bramble bush, and out across the narrow path two or three callow nestlings were hurled along with moss and twigs, rotten wood and hay that had one moment before been a snug and comfortable home. And whilst the mother bird with broken wing hopped pitiably from spray to spray with troubled and affrighted cries, and her mate came flying swiftly home to join in lamentation, the reckless young brute set up a triumphant shout and laughed as if he had done a glorious deed.

Involuntarily Mr. Webb checked his horse.

"Young man," said he gravely, "can you find no better pastime than the wanton destruction of a happy home?"

"It's only a blackbird's nest," growled the destroyer, as if resenting interference.

"It was the birds' home, young man. There they hoped to rear the fledglings your idle recklessness has flung out to die."

"Did ever any one hear such a pother over a bird's nest and brood," cried the fellow with a derisive laugh.

"Home is a sacred place, and life is sacred, whether it belong to bird, or beast, or man, and woe to him who breaks into one or the other for idle sport. Hark! how the parent birds are wailing for their dying chicks. Have you no heart to feel for them?" was asked.

The young man gripped his stick and scowled till his thick black brows met.

"Are you a parson or a schoolmaster, that you preach to one so glibly. Had I knocked you from your perch you could hardly have made more outcry."

"Perhaps less," answered the old gentleman solemnly, "for I have no home, and my life is near its end. But, mark me, young man, the time *may* come when you may know all that is meant by a ruined home and a desolate heart, and then you may realize what these poor birds must suffer." So saying, he gave his horse a hint to go forward.

The other blocked the way and caught the bridle.

"Harkee, sir!" cried he viciously. "It's ill setting hot blood to boil. If there had not been a look in your face of some one who was a good friend to me when I was a little

lad and played truant from my father's school, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't have laid you as low as these cursed chicks." And down went his heavy heel on one of his still panting victims, as he shook his stick with a frowning menace.

"The hanging is likely to come in time, Francis Field, if you amend not your ways. Cruelty is a sure stepping-stone to the gallows."

A touch of the spurs as he spoke sent on the astonished cob at a quickened pace as the young man called Francis Field dropped the bridle and recoiled, alike at the stranger's familiar utterance of his name and the prophetic ring of his warning voice.

Ere he recovered from his blank amazement, Peter Webb's beast had splashed through a shallow stream called Dover Beck, the forest boundary which crossed the road close at hand, and was off at a good round trot to Oxton and the open country, less than a mile away. The threats and anathemas of the schoolmaster's son were therefore unheard.

Had Francis Field followed the traveller, instead of pursuing his own course towards Nottingham at a pace quickened by irritation, he might have noted as something peculiar that a second flap of the broad beaver had

been released, and shadowed the aged eyes when he stopped at the village hostelry to bait his horse and refresh himself. And yet it wanted an hour of noon, and grey clouds flecked the blue ether to temper the rays of the noonday sun. Moreover, he kept his hat well down upon his brow whilst he feasted frugally on bread and cheese and a horn of ale, and checked the gossip of the podgy landlord with his own taciturnity.

Mine host was not so easily repressed. He was full of a great wedding there had been in Oxton Church the day before, between Miss West, of West Hall, and her cousin, Squire West of Westhorpe, and would not spare his customer a single detail, from the bride's sacque of white satin and stomacher laced with silver, to the sky-blue velvet coat and satin breeches of the bridegroom, her towering head dress, his powdered peruke, his sword and her jewels, the very buckles in their shoes, the numerous guests, the festivities to follow, which were to last a week.

Nay, so full was he of his unwonted budget of news, that he failed to observe the traveller's want of appetite, or the tremor that shook his aged hands as he sat and listened with never a word to indicate attention.

It could scarcely be to see how the villagers had garlanded the little church for the occa-

sion, that Peter Webb bent his steps thither, for he went no farther than a flat tombstone raised in the churchyard under an ancient yew tree to the memory of—a woman.

There he bowed his head, and kneeling down with clasped hands seemed to pour forth his whole soul in sobs of contrite agony. And ere he turned away he kissed the four-year-old inscription on the stone, and left behind a fresh sprig of rue he had brought with him.

Yet it may be the landlord's wedding gossip had not fallen on deaf ears. When the horseman was again upon the high road with his face towards Southwell, he turned off sharply to his left, down a winding and sequestered lane. There bean and clover fields on either hand scarcely overpowered the scent of nettles and sweetbriar on the wild banks, and the tall fox-gloves nodded to him as he passed on to reach a noble avenue of splendid beeches extending right and left, only to look upon the ancient edifice they called West Hall, a picturesque specimen of black and white timber and rubble architecture, all nooks and angles, gables and pinnacles, nailstudded doors, and small-paned mullioned windows.

His eyes were humid as he stopped and gazed upon it, and marked through open doors and casements the merry doings within, the

bustle of servants and others coming and going, and ere he turned away invoked an involuntary blessing on the wedded pair.

What were these weddingers to him?

The afternoon was pretty well advanced when, having made another detour to Westhorpe, again to gaze like an antiquary on an old house front, he slowly entered Southwell. There his horse, as if he knew his duty, stopped at the office of Bulwell and Son, attorneys-at-law, where the specklessness of windows and paint seemed to vouch for integrity and respectability.

Out came a dapper black-coated gentleman, with spotless cambric neckcloth and ruffles, a few years younger than the caller. Bows were exchanged, and a few brief words, an appointment was made for the morrow; and then Peter Webb went wearily and sadly on to put up at the then King's Arms, where tradition said the saddest of England's sad monarchs had in his need taken shelter. And there must Mr. Webb be left with his secrets and his sorrows.

CHAPTER VII.

BROKEN BONDS.

During the race week that year Will was not kept a closer prisoner than the rest. But he had less care to go abroad, having nothing better than his old coat to show off in; and had less hankering after Dolly Parker.

With the perversity ascribed to her sex, as he retreated so did she seem disposed to advance, smiling, nodding, speaking to him whenever they chanced to meet, however cold might be his response.

On his part he could not help contrasting her with his modest and retiring sister Catherine, who had kept an impatient lover at bay for many years.

As was then customary on such occasions the recruiting sergeant and his satellites had been busy during the holiday week. The bom-bom of the drum and the shrill toot-toot-toot of the fife had floated in the air over tree-tops and houses from lanes and rows above or below the level, as they paraded hither and thither, now away on the racecourse, anon in

the open Market Place, wherever there was a crowd to gape or a chance of snapping up idle or ill-fed rustics and journeymen. At their chief rendezvous, the Malt Cross, was their ally, the tapster from the Bell in Angel Row with ale in frothing measures for whomsoever would, and there also, mounted on the steps of the cross, was a piper to play for whomsoever would dance to his piping.

Being market-day, there were country lads and lasses ready enough to dance, for, as the cunning sergeant well knew it was round about the light and airy many-pillared Malt Cross, and in front of the cross-barred gates, of the old black and white four-gabled Town Hall just beyond, that labourers and others wanting employment congregated to be hired. And as he knew equally well that drink and lasses did half his business, he jingled the shillings in his pockets, handed about the ale, and clapped his applauding hands as they footed it right merrily to the pipe and drum, the most jovial and appreciative of entertainers; whilst the market people, selling their wares in the spacious area or waiting for customers, kept time to the tunes with feet or with nodding heads.

Music had ever a fascination for William. Not long before he had given half-a-crown of his hard earnings for an old instrument called

a bell-harp, out of which he strove to evoke harmony; and the hope of catching a new tune drew him towards the crowd between the Malt Cross and the Town Hall. The latter building comprised also the gaol, and overlooked with small windows and vertically striped front the long Market Place from its upper and wider end, as if to over-awe the traders and others with suggestions of stripes and imprisonment awaiting evil doers, even though the cucking-stool and pillory had disappeared from its immediate neighbourhood.

Roper and Dolly Parker were there before him. The former doing his rough best to set matters straight with her, had half persuaded her to join the ring of dancers with him.

He held her hand in his, and she had taken a step or two forward, when she espied William Hutton not many paces away.

At once she withdrew her hand, refused to dance, and when he became importunate, and pressed for a reason, betook herself to the side of his once-upon-a-time rival, with a toss of the head and a mere "I've changed my mind."

She greeted William with a smile, asked if he had been to the races? How he spent the week? If that was him she had heard playing music so delightfully? If he liked dancing? Then she vowed she was vastly fond of a

round or a reel, and gave him clearly to understand that although she had refused to dance with Roper, she would be ready to join hands with *him* for a partner.

It was a critical moment for the young man.

It would be a fine opportunity to turn the tables on Roper. She looked wonderfully attractive in her straw hat and pink ribbons, her sky-blue gingham gown and white kerchief.

For a moment he stood hesitating between temptation and resolution. He was on the very point of surrender. At that moment she turned her head and cast on his mortified fellow-apprentice a quick glance of exultant derision. William had seen that expression on her face once before, and he drew back involuntarily—the charm broken.

The action was, however, unseen by Roper, who, in a towering rage, plucked her away with a rude jerk, and clenching his big fist in William's face, with a tremendous oath, swore, vindictively, "I'll have my revenge on you, Bill Hutton, for coming between me and my sweetheart. Aye, if I wait fifty years for it."

There were those in the crowd who would have urged on a fight between the two, of whom the busiest was the young fellow Mr. Webb had encountered in the forest, and addressed as Francis Field.

But neither William nor the blusterer were of pugilistic mettle, the latter was coward as well as bully; the former, though strong to endure, had no spontaneous courage and was not likely to fight for one unworthy his regard.

With a mere "Take her, and welcome!" he edged his way out of the press, and left jealous Roper and indignant Dolly to adjust their differences without him.

This was not an amicable process, for when William was gone, Dolly turned coquettishly to Francis Field, and seemed more disposed to dance and laugh with him than to listen to the jealous speeches of Roper.

Be sure the wide-awake sergeant kept his keen eyes on the three.

That night the military detachment, without communicating the secret of route or destination, marched out of Nottingham, across the meadows, over many-arched Trent Bridge, along the London Road, with a string of drunken recruits in tow, and Joseph Roper made one of the uproarious squad.

It was almost midnight before he was missed; morning before his enlistment was a certainty. It was then too late to follow, and George Hutton had to smother his chagrin, and make the best of his loss. Little use was it then to remember that whenever

Roper had been out of humour he had threatened to enlist.

Of course Mrs. Hutton laid the blame on William for making mischief between Roper and his sweetheart, and having set him a bad example, and when there was no chance of overtaking or recovering him, she lamented the loss of the "willing lad" who was always ready to fetch or carry for her; and seemed unconscious that Roper had been glad of any excuse to quit the monotonous frame, even had he not been rewarded for subservience alike with praise and pudding.

George Hutton's passion soon cooled, he said that "Roper had never been worth his salt as a frame-knitter. His two years teaching had been almost thrown away. It was a loss truly, but might have been worse." His departure was a matter for unanimous rejoicing amongst the remaining apprentices to whom Roper had been a 'thorn in the flesh,' but there was not one who dared hint his satisfaction.

Before the commotion created by his disappearance had subsided Mr. Webb returned, and cast his opinion into the scale.

"You are well rid of the lout, Mr. Hutton, he was a dangerous and mischievous inmate. I hope he will never have a chance to keep his evil threat. Small minds like his find only room to harbour grudges."

It was Monday evening. The lads were preparing to go out.

George Hutton sat puffing away at his pipe in a corner of the bright settle, meditating how and where to replace the lost hand now that trade was so slack, for on the number of his apprentices depended a stockinger's chief profit. Occasionally he exchanged a word with his saving wife, then seaming up a parcel of newly knitted stockings to save employing a trade seamer.

She had been holding forth on the general depravity of lads, who "thought it no dishonesty to eat their employer's victuals, and rob him of his due by idleness and carelessness."

Presently Mr. Webb, who looked as if he wanted quiet and repose after his journey, dipped his slender hand into a big pocket and drew forth a black pocket-book, which he opened, and handed to Will a slip of paper.

"Read that aloud, Will, for the benefit of the company," he said, "I copied it years ago from a tablet in an old church tower, not many miles away, I think at a place called Cotgrave."

Will took the paper, and read out, not without hesitation, and a rising colour.

"King Charles's Rules."

("Of blessed memory!" put in the old gentleman, whether referring to the king or to the rules was not clear. It might be both.)

William proceeded, "Profane no divine ordinances: Touch no State matters: Urge no healths: Pick no quarrels: Maintain no ill opinions: Encourage no vice: Repeat no old grievances: Reveal no secrets: Make no comparisons: Keep no bad company: Make no long meals: Lay no wagers: Do nothing in anger."

Mr. Webb sighed as the last words were read, and the smoker shook the ashes from his pipe before he remarked, "Good rules those, whoever made them."

"Aye," said Mr. Webb, "rules for subjects to ponder as well as kings. Get your copy-book, Will, and write them down in your best round hand, to be hung up in the work-room, for the use of all who have need of them, young or old."

Mrs. Hutton muttered something about "Jacobite meddling," as Will rose to obey, but it was under her breath.

Copybook, inkhorn, pens were laid before him, and with some squaring of elbows the young scribe set about his task with no small pride at being so singled out, and a desire to show off his penmanship.

To do this he must mend his pen, and for

this Mr. Webb's knife was requisitioned. When "King Charles's Rules" were duly put to paper with the addition of the word "golden" at the old gentleman's request, and when he and George Hutton had expressed their approval of the calligraphy, William handed back the curious and coveted knife to its owner.

For once, he did not take it back.

"Nay, William," said he, "my writing days are well-nigh over. If I want a pen you can make it for me. You can put the knife in your pocket as a keepsake from me now, without waiting until I am dead. It will be useful to you, and may keep me in your memory when I am laid to rest—and I care not how soon that may be," he added in a lower key.

"Knives cut love," suggested Mrs. Hutton, not pleasantly.

The old man started up in his chair, grasping its arms with both his hands, his thin lips white and quivering. Almost fiercely he cried out, "Aye, mistress, they do, I needed no reminder with that knife before me. That was a love gift. Put it out of sight, Will, and give it not away. Love is gone—and life is going; why should I keep it longer?"

Then he sank back in his chair, and there was silence. Was it not prevision?

Beyond that temporary silence no note was taken of the vehement ejaculation or the exhaustion that followed.

This was in a measure due to the extreme discomposure of the stockinger and his wife over the empty frame in the work-room and the empty stool in the kitchen, both so abruptly vacated.

The question how to fill the former profitably without paying journeyman's wages (a *sine-qua-non* with the parsimonious wife) so occupied and engrossed their consideration for the succeeding day or two, that they were totally blind to the signs of another departure involving a still greater loss—to no one greater than to William.

In their pre-occupation they had failed to note the marked change in Mr. Webb since his late return home. Even his casual complaint of restless nights and a fluttering at his heart scarcely drew forth a comment from Mrs. Hutton.

William was not so oblivious; he saw how feebly the old gentleman mounted the stairs at night, how willingly he accepted assistance to undress or dress, and how often his hand went to his side, when his face would contract as with a sharp spasm.

"You had better see the apothecary, sir, I am sure you are very ill," urged the young

man the night following the presentation of the silver knife.

"Oh, I may be better in a day or two. I only want rest—rest."

"I'm afraid you are not strong enough to take long journeys, sir. Could not some one do your business for you?"

How keen a glance was that the feeble man shot at Will with the words,

"My business, what do you know of my business? What is known of me or of my business?"

"Nothing, sir, and I meant no intrusion." Will apologized.

"Well, well, perhaps not." And closing the conversation he lay down, but not to rest.

The next night passed, and the next came; the ascent of the stairs tried him greatly. He sat down gasping on a box near the door, with his hand as usual on his side.

Presently he said, "I'm not partial to doctors or their potions, but I think I shall take your advice, William, and see one in the morning if I am not better."

Then, as William helped him into bed, and adjusted his pillows, he gasped out, "Thank you, my boy, for your kindness to an old man. When I get better I mean to reward you. I'll make your fortune for you. You

need not smile," and his voice sank lower, "I can do it, and I will. I'm not a poor man, and my name's not Pet—but that's my secret—I may tell you some day, but not now. Good-night, and God bless you!"

His voice had been low, and his speech had been broken by pauses, which Will attributed to shortness of breath consequent on the effort to get into bed. He returned the "good-night" with smiling thanks for promises which he regarded as chimerical, and lay down on his own pallet, wondering if the poor old man's mind was wandering.

In the middle of the night he was startled out of sleep by a strange sharp cry like to nothing he had ever heard. He had been early trained to rise on the instant with his senses awake, and in another minute he had his arms round his aged friend, who was sitting up in bed with both hands on his side, his ashen face distorted with agony.

His "Oh, sir, what can I do for you?" was answered with a gasping and faint, "Doctor! Quick!"

Will made a sudden rush to rouse his brother, waken his uncle and aunt, bid Tom run for Doctor Deering.

He was not away more than three minutes. He found Mr. Webb sunk back on the pillows with a strange yearning expression in his

eyes, his breath laboured, his lips apart and quivering.

Trembling with his own fears Will raised him tenderly, and laid the bald head against his own shoulder.

He thought his aunt and uncle would never come. He saw that *some one* was coming, coming uncalled for and unsought, and he was afraid. His fears almost overtopped his anguish.

There was a terrible struggle for speech, the straining eyes proclained it—"Going!—oh, God!—secret—my name—Phil—bury with my——"

And that was the last articulate word of the man known as Peter Webb.

When George Hutton, half-dressed, reached the attic-chamber with his wife behind him, there was a painful movement of the blue lips, but not a sound audible to human ears.

Terrible spasms convulsed limbs and features, and the brandy with which Mrs. Hutton wetted his lips availed nothing.

The dying man seemed to fight with death for utterance—for power to break the seal of silence held intact too long.

In vain. If ever revelation would be made it must come from other sources, those lips had said their last word.

Doctor Deering might go back as he came. He was of no use there.

William's suppressed sobs alone broke the silence in which the only kind friend he had known breathed his last sigh out on his breast.

As Peter Webb he had been known, as Peter Webb he was buried in St. Mary's churchyard, the black pocket-book which provided the means, and more than the means, containing besides only notes in cypher and no clue to relations or connections.

A student in heraldry might have found a clue in the engraved seal-ring of the dead man which Mrs. Hutton so coolly appropriated, but to her and hers there was no symbolism in the setting sun it bore.

And though the fragmentary utterances of the dying gentleman often recurred to the impressionable mind of the young fellow whose "fortune" he had promised to make, his aunt had taken him so sharply to task for "heeding the ravings of a man dying and off his head," that he kept to himself all former revelations.

One thing puzzled him greatly. He could never be certain whether the word he had taken for "Phil," had been merely a cry to himself, "*Will*,"—or to some absent friend, or was a failing attempt to reveal his own true name.

Strangely enough, in the new trouble and excitement neither George Hutton, nor his wife, nor William, who with mourning and sorrow helped to carry the revered head to its last rest, gave a thought to the sealed packet of papers lying dumb and insensate in the darkness of the rarely opened oaken desk. Or if Mrs. Hutton thought of it she held her peace and let it lie.

CHAPTER VIII.

FREEDOM.

Mrs. Hutton had "improved the occasion," of Mr. Webb's sudden death in pious homilies to the living on "the uncertainty of life," the "need for preparation for another world;" and her "fears for the old man's state" were many; but her chief concern was the loss of the money he had paid for his scant accommodation, and as she had appropriated his signet ring without scruple, so she laid hands on his watch and other belongings—as payment due for service rendered to the dead.

His shelf of books—little more than Rapin's "English History," Cocker's "Dictionary" and "Arithmetic," Barrow's "Sermons against Evil Speaking," and some loose numbers of the "Universal Magazine" and the "Gentleman's Magazine"—these, after some wordy disputation between uncle and aunt, William was allowed to call his own.

Great was his delight at their acquisition. It might be tempered by the remembrance that in gaining them he had lost his best

friend, but his gratification was undoubted. They had long been treasures to him as fountains of knowledge, but now the books had become more than that—they were *property*, something to possess and call *his own*. As he surveyed them a new spirit seemed to kindle within him, and he felt as if the first instalment of Peter Webb's promised fortune was already his.

But his learned expositor was gone. And his intellectual acquaintance came no more for social intercourse to the stockinger's after they had laid their friend in his grave and discovered that alike to one and all "the poor old gentleman had been a mystery and a puzzle."

There could be no night-study now the rushlight was gone, and, what William missed the most, there was no kindly ear in which to pour his griefs or his aspirations.

If study languished he found a refuge and a solace for his melancholy in music, that outlet for the woes of half the Nottingham apprentices. He had a fine ear, but neither books nor master, so it mattered not to him whether he played indoors or out, in the dark or the light, and when he picked up a tune he found words of his own come readily as he carolled lustily at his frame.

In fact he had taken his uncle's sharp lesson to heart, and whatsoever he undertook he "did

it with his might," whether at the stocking frame, the jingling bell-harp, or the athletics he practised with Martin and others in the meadows by the riverside. (Commerce coveted those meadows long ago, good reader, and covered them and their crocuses with wharves and warehouses. Nottingham, like other manufacturing towns, has far outgrown the limit trod by William Hutton and his *confrères.*)

He had pasted "King Charles's Golden Rules" on a board, and hung it up in the work-room: Some one, either aunt or uncle, added thereto, "The hand of the diligent maketh rich."

"I say, Thomas," he said with a jog of his stolid brother's elbow the first time he observed the addendum, "Is our diligence to make uncle rich or ourselves?"

"Both, maybe," quoth Thomas, and he set his frame in motion without another word.

In practical exemplification of the text William in another year again blossomed forth a beau in a small way. He had not yet attained the crowning glory of a wig, but that did not prevent him holding his head erect as he trod the Long Pavement where lay the Meeting House, proud of all that diligence and self-denial had done for his outer man.

He would fain have roused a like ambition in Thomas, but he preferred to go on in his own jog-trot way, without troubling to make an appearance. He stuck at his work, but was not quick, and only an inferior quality of worsted hose was knitted in his frame, so he earned less with overtime, but it did not trouble him. His wants were few. He was as ready to scrub a floor for his aunt as to knit a stocking, and asked no more recreation than a book in a chimney corner, or under one of the oaks in Sherwood Forest.

Will, on the contrary, had a rising desire for admiration. He did not care to blush unseen. He practised his bell-harp in the open garden when the stars were out, and he sported his new plum-coloured garments among the young men and maidens of his own class, no longer afraid of speaking to a pretty girl, but rather disposed to prove to Dolly that she was of no account to him. He no longer avoided her, but thinking himself secure, laughed and chatted with her, listened to the tale she told of Roper's jealousy, and of their quarrels about him. Next Valentine's Day, in the lover's lottery, she drew him as her Valentine, or said she did, and thereupon established a monopoly of his attentions.

There is no knowing what this might have

led to in time, had Dolly been as prudent as she was pretty. She had more than half convinced him that Joseph Roper had been the evil genius in their way two years before, and his aged mentor's advice was fast fading from his memory; but he was not so much wooing as wooed, and the impatient damsel broke the charm by asking, 'How soon he meant to marry her, she thought it quite time?'

For a moment he looked at her abashed and confounded. Had the crater of a volcano opened beneath his feet he could scarcely have been more dismayed.

"Why don't you speak?" said she.

"Better be silent than speak folly," was his sober reply. "You're for jumping the hedge without thought for the ditch; a woman should wait till she's asked; and I shall ask no girl to wed till I'm my own master, and can keep a comfortable home over a wife's head, and save something besides. I have seen too much hardship. Poverty spoils pretty faces. I am not going to church with a pretty face and poverty at once, not I. And I'll have a modest wife or none, Dolly Parker."

He turned on his heel in disgust, and left her standing on Castle Hill, to look after him, and learn wisdom at leisure, but she shot a few sharp words after him that served to nail resolution fast.

"If yow won't ha' me I know them as will, and glad of the chance, Bill Hutton! Pretty girls needn't go a begging!"

"I've had a narrow escape," thought he as he hurried out of sight, wiping the dew from his forehead. "It's put me all in a shake. Did she take me for a fool? Mr. Webb would have called me a fool to go near her. Well, I don't burn my wings with that flame again."

He thought of nothing else all the way home. As he opened the gate he said to himself, "Maids mean mischief, and matrimony without money means misery. Music only means mirth and melody. I'll make myself a dulcimer and keep clear of that bold baggage."

He went to bed with this resolve and kept to it. His silver pocket-knife and a couple of tools, used to keep his stocking-frame in order, served at once to convert an old box into a dulcimer and to keep him out of Dolly Parker's trap; not so easy a matter considering that they lived in the same lane, that in fine weather she sat at open door or window, and would make free to stop him if they met.

His friend Martin fell in love with his melodious dulcimer to the tune of sixteen shillings, and he converted the sixteen shillings into a warm great coat.

"This will give me more comfort than Dolly Parker ever would," he said satisfactorily, as he put it on.

A prosaic ending to a first love! But that first exercise of his ingenuity, that first conversion of waste material into a marketable commodity by his own hand, roused dormant energies and ideas that never slumbered again if love had gone to sleep. Dolly lived to rue her impatience. She had taken good care to let her recalcitrant swain learn that "she had more than one string to her bow."

Thomas, who had no finery to air on the promenade of the Long Pavement, or to tempt footpads elsewhere, was wont to take a book and a stroll into the quiet shades of Sherwood Forest on Sunday afternoons. There, more than once or twice during that summer, he came across Dolly Parker, all smiles and dimples, leaning on the arm of a tall, black-browed young fellow, whose laced neckcloth seemed a token of her favour. She was sure to give easy-going Thomas a nod of recognition in passing, which seemed to challenge a report in Woolpack Lane.

She did not stop at that. Meeting Thomas when she was alone she bade him, with a toss of her flaxen head,

"Tell yowr Bill that a finer man than him is going to marry me, and a better scholar

And I don't care *that* for him!" and she snapped her fingers scornfully.

Rumour had been busy with her name for some time, and when William Hutton put on his warm consolatory coat at the Goose Fair, the glass-blower was breaking up his house. His eighteen-year-old daughter had left him to marry a schoolmaster's son at Southwell. But he did not seem proud of the match, and was heard in his cups—glass-blowing is a thirsty occupation—to call his new son-in-law "A lazy, thriftless wastrel, with all his learning and his Latin."

Mrs. Hutton had very speedily replaced her dead lodger with a young whip-maker, as lithe as the goods he made there by his own bedside; and to him she was exceptionally gracious.

She was much less gracious to the occupants of the back attic, where William again slept along with three other apprentices, his little brother Samuel now being one. But no sly Roper was there to make mischief, and the three brothers could keep peace with their other companion.

In two more years manhood broke the bonds of William's apprenticeship. How he rejoiced in the sensation and prospect of liberty! It did not apparently bring him nearer fortune. A very short experience as

his uncle's journeyman sufficed him. His wages were poor, and his parsimonious aunt, fair-faced as she was to her new lodger, yet grudged the food he and his brothers ate, and worked for.

The very creaking and croaking of his frame irritated him. He was getting into debt. He felt he was labouring only for others profit, and he ceased to sing as he knitted away.

"Fourteen years of my life gone for nothing! Two apprenticeships served, two trades learned and not a living to be got at either!" seemed to be the incessant wail of his frame, the echo of his own pain.

"I'll be my own master, hire a frame, and work for the warehouses," was the outcome of his brooding. Straightway he sought permission to set up a frame in his uncle's workroom, where was ample space.

"Aye, aye, my lad, and welcome. It's only fair to let thee have a start," was George Hutton's ready assent.

William introduced the subject the next day. He was then answered moodily, "I've thought better of it. I'm not minded to help thee to my custom."

"That's none of Uncle George's own thinking. Aunt Ann in the background hath insinuated distrust. His mind's a fair unsullied

page, till her suspicion puts a big blot upon it," said William bitterly to Thomas, when the uncle's back was turned.

Still the idea of being his own master had entered the young man's mind and was not to be driven out, even with the fact that the stocking trade was at a low ebb, and that his uncle was growing poorer and not richer as the years stole by.

Trade might well be at a standstill, for the heart of England was disquieted by another Jacobite rising. Nay, the young Pretender had marched as far as Derby, on his way to Finchley, and if London quaked in its many shoes, Nottingham was not likely to feel composed. Fugitives from Derby flocked thither in shoals to spread dismay, only to be followed by glad tidings of the rebels' retreat.

Back went the fugitives, and amongst other curious folk went William Hutton, more troubled about his father than ever that father had been about him.

Of course he found Derby all in commotion. Not a familiar nook or corner but held some one with something to tell, and all went into one of the niches of that wonderful cabinet he called his memory, there to lie quiescent like the forgotten papers in the old oak desk, waiting the hand that should draw them forth.

For the coincident and startling family intelligence which met him almost as soon as he had crossed the bridge he was not prepared. Yet it was a pivot on which his life would turn,—aye, and sway the destinies of greater folk, the far-off and unknown.

About two years previously his father had wisely married a prudent widow having a comfortable home.

Here he found him, all excitement, but neither with ale nor popular frenzy. Perkins, the little tailor and parish clerk of Swithland, in Leicestershire, who had courted Catherine Hutton from the time she was a girl of twelve in the house of her shopkeeping aunts, had, along with half-a-dozen rebel soldiers, invaded the peaceful sanctuary the woolcomber now called his home and created as great a panic as the Jacobites.

His daughter Catherine was supposed to be serving as housekeeper to a pious Presbyterian minister at Gainsborough, where she had been for many years.

Nothing of the kind. She had been Catherine Perkins for two years unknown to them all.

But the little clerk had not made the journey to Derby in midwinter, when the roads were alive with rebels, only to tell his father-in-law that.

It appeared that Catherine—who was a

well-formed, handsome young woman, albeit she had red hair—owned a will and opinions as strong and decided as the maiden aunts at Swithland, who had reared and educated her from childhood, and that although she had been induced to marry in private so long back, it was not until her husband made a solemn promise to throw up his clerkship and remove from Swithland, that she had consented to quit the good master she had served so long, and take up her abode with her master by marriage. Three months had gone by. The promise made in August had not been fulfilled in December, and now Catherine, without choosing to render a reason, insisted that if her husband would not leave Swithland, she would leave him.

The little clerk had come with his grievance to implore his father-in-law's intercession; and he, after the first lamentations over the secret marriage, was as lugubrious and dolorous about the domestic "rebellion" of Catherine, as if he had been the best of fathers, who, after mating a daughter to his heart's content and her advancement, found all his care defeated.

William left his father to his lamentations, and trudged back to Nottingham through rain and slush, more troubled about his dearly loved sister than any doings of the Jacobites.

Barely had he passed the newly-erected

China works outside St. Mary's Bridge, than he made way for the passage of a substantial-looking farmer on horseback, in whom he recognized a relation of Farmer Grace. Behind him, on a pillion, sat a little maiden, protected from the weather by a thick riding coat and a contrivance of oilskin and whalebone called a calesh, which enveloped head and bonnet both, and defied rain. William had a fair view of her face in passing, and of a golden tress or two blown by the wind. At once his thoughts went back to the little fairy whose hat he had rescued from Markeaton brook, and wondered if this was a younger sister. She could not be the same. Sally Cox would surely have grown more in four years."

He turned his head and looked back to see her looking after him with a puzzled expression in her bright eyes.

"I do believe she is the same. What a morsel! What are they coming here for? Are they afraid the rebels have run off with their cousins?"

As he said this to himself his mind went off to the day he had caught Sally Cox's hat, and the plight he was in, her remark that he was civil as a gentleman, then on to the incivility of her Birmingham uncle, and by devious ways round to Catherine and her spouse.

In Nottingham the conduct and motives of Catherine Perkins were discussed with more warmth than came from the fire on the stockinger's hearthstone; William stoutly insisting that they should hear his sister's side of the story before censure or judgment was passed.

George Hutton, puffing away at his pipe, pronounced his opinion, "Being a dissenter, no doubt she feels uneasy in her mind as the wife of a parish clerk, and, as a point of conscience, wishes him to resign."

"Conscience, indeed! A consistent Presbyterian would never have consented to marry a Churchman, let alone a clerk. She knew what he was beforehand, and must take the consequences," was the dictum of her Aunt Ann.

But Catherine Perkins at the age of twenty-seven was not disposed to take consequences as they came. She was more inclined to create consequences, to drive than to be driven. She might have absorbed the self-will of the whole family in her own person. The little clerk and tailor was no match for her.

Even Mrs. George Hutton lost her prerogative and vailed her front when Catherine Perkins walked into her kitchen early in January, 1746, and shook the snow from her thick grey cloak at the yard door. She came

as one whose right to be there was unquestionable; one, moreover, who was not disposed to render a reason beyond her own will. Yet she was too independent to eat a crust she had not earned or paid for; and though she took the initiative in arranging for her own accommodation, the sum she tendered for a bed on the huge sofa in the best parlour left Mrs. Hutton without an excuse for refusal.

She soon put down discussion of her conduct. "I am accountable to God only for my actions; let no one interfere," was the law she laid down.

And interference was of little use, for though she was followed in a few days by her husband, who offered to make a home for her close to her Uncle Ward's at Mountsorrel, there was no bridging the gulf between them. Her decision was final. He went back alone to Swithland. Whatever his offence she *never* rejoined him.

The ill-wind that blew husband and wife apart, blew a scrap of good fortune into the lap of William; at all events, satisfied his craving to be his own master.

Thrifty Catherine had saved money in service. She was careful, but not niggardly. She furnished the means for her brother to set up a frame of his own, and either the sight of the ten golden guineas, or a desire to stand

well with the strong-willed woman who paid well for a bed on a spare sofa silenced the aunt's note of opposition.

It was a proud day for William. But Catherine Perkins was too far-seeing to destroy her brother's self-dependence and industry at the outset. The money was lent, not given.

"Every shilling I have was got together with honest work and self-denial, and I shall expect you to work hard to repay me some day," she said. "I trust you to pay me back when you are able; but I shall not hurry you."

It was well he had not an urgent creditor, for if his uncle George, an old and well-known master stockinger, had difficulty in disposing of his wares, how was the new beginner to find customers! He did not find his mastership as profitable as he expected. To save money was impossible. He could scarcely obtain a bare subsistence.

Matters were anything but flourishing in the stocking trade. George Hutton had one loss after another, and every loss told on his wife's temper and his own health. His depression increased as the months went by, and more meekly he bowed his head to the matrimonial yoke. But a change was at hand for him and for all.

One oppressive day in September, as Will sat in his frame, near the open casement, shap-

ing silk into a stocking and his thoughts into verse at the same time, he was startled by a sudden and sharp call to him from the lane.

"Bill, Bill Hutton, come to your uncle! Quick!"

Leaning against one of the oaken pillars that upheld the upper floors, William found his good uncle, white and faint, with the red blood pouring in a stream from his mouth. He had broken a blood-vessel.

A few days of ignorant quackery, and the great change came.

CHAPTER IX.

CATHERINE PERKINS.

It was indeed a change. Before George Hutton had been laid to rest in the peaceful and silent house of night a couple of weeks, autocratic Catherine, taunted with having "no home," had made a clear sweep of herself, her brothers, and their belongings out of the house in Woolpack Lane to a small thatched dwelling she had taken for herself in a spot called Bearward Lane, where two bears had once been kept in ward not far from the Bar (Bear) Gate. In so doing, she had placed fully half-a-mile between themselves and the sharp-tongued aunt, who was left to mourn over her self created desolation to her only remaining lodger, Robert Tanner, the young whip-maker, and to console herself as best she might.

In common with most men of the period who had occasion to face the perils of the roads between town and town with goods, or money in saddle-bags or pockets, George Hutton had left a will, and there was certainly

some little cash in Smith's bank, and it was over the adjustment of the dead man's affairs so as to secure the equitable reversion of his little property to Thomas and William at the widow's death that the two came into collision.

Ann Hutton resented the interference of practical Catherine, at first with a whine, and then with acrid reflections on the memory of the dead will-maker and all his kin, and so she was left to settle her affairs at her own discretion—or indiscretion as it proved.

Busy as bees had the three seceders been white washing and scrubbing the small house in Bearward Lane, before William's frame was taken down, and she began to realize what their defection meant. Thomas had been only his uncle's journeyman for more than a year, and was free to go whither he would, whilst Samuel and the other apprentice had taken to their heels in company before her days of widowhood.

Energetic Catherine Perkins had not merely rented a house which she said she "meant to make a home for them all," but she had already found a new master for steady, easy-going Thomas, and drawn on her frugally hoarded savings for such furniture and utensils as were indispensable. And she took care that no time was lost before all were settled

and in working order, she leading and directing everything.

She indicated the spot where William's frame was to stand on the smooth, hard, white plaster floor, close by the broad, low window for the light, and she bade Thomas help him to set it up, whilst she arranged matters in the house-place and elsewhere.

A stout oaken coffer had followed her by carrier from Mountsorrel, and after she had ranged their fair wooden platters and porringers on a sort of bulk-head dresser, built in the house-wall, she dived into the coffer, and without hesitation brought forth her store of linen spun and bleached by herself for a very different home, and a number of other articles for use or ornament, the gifts of masters and mistresses for faithful service.

Their first meal in the new abode was merely bread and cheese (cheese at threepence per pound); but she had covered the three-legged deal table with a whiter homespun cloth, and set a small earthenware mug of water by each platter, as an intimation of the order she intended to inaugurate.

As the two hungry young fellows came in for their impromptu repast, she was standing in front of the open fireplace where a low fire of wood and coal was smouldering on the stone hearth, and placing on the high black shelf

above it (to keep a couple of long, bright, iron candlesticks and the tinder-box company), a gaily-coloured Toby Fillpot ale-jug, "You go there," she said, as if to herself, but it was in her brothers' hearing, "and stay there, a sign and a token that no ale comes under this roof whilst I own it." Then turning round she added with a sigh, "We will have no Toby Tosspots here, my brothers; let those who rave of Nottingham ale drink it. We know that ale runs away with wit, money, and health; water preserves all three and costs nothing. Let us drink it and thank God for his gift."

"Aye, Catherine," put in William, "if we only eat when we're hungry and drink when we're dry, we may do without ale and save the money. I seldom spend my pennies in pints."

She saw them both taking a general survey as they placed their wooden stools at the round table.

"We are not crowded out with goods and chattels," she said, following their eyes, "but chairs and tables do not make a home, neither do indolence and luxurious fare. I mean, God willing, here to make a home, and a happy one, for you lads as well as myself; but you will have to do your share. You will have to pay me for your accommodation

fairly, as you paid your aunt. And if we would bring other comforts round us we must all three work hard and live frugally."

"We have never been pampered; and industry's no hardship when one can reap the benefit one's self," cried Will, in the best of humours. "The music of your spinning-wheel will keep my knitting frame in tune. Besides," and again he glanced at the coffer, the platter-shelves, the mantel-board, "everything is fresh, clean, and wholesome, and your handsome, smiling face, Catherine, is better than all the polished tables and bureaus, glass and china Aunt Ann hath not the heart to use. I have never before felt I had a home, and God bless you for this."

"So say I," added Thomas, with unwonted emphasis, as he cut away at the big brown loaf without fear of a rebuke.

And so, with good appetites, and love for seasoning, they made a banquet of their bread and cheese. So Catherine Perkins created for her long-tried brothers a home, of which she was to be the dominant head. Not with a profusion of worldly goods, not with a prospect of luxurious ease; but with a firm hand and a clear head, strong determination, abundant faith and a basis of self-denial.

That was Saturday. Sunday morning saw them all at meeting, although they had not

all mourning suits, and Mrs. George Hutton passed them with scornful pity. The golden September sun shone in their hopeful faces as they took an afternoon stroll together, round by the foot of Castle Hill to the green meadows and willow-shaded banks of the Leen, to turn aside to the great red rock and go in and out of the curiously excavated caverns underneath the farther hill, speculating as they went whether monkish hands indeed had dug out those cloistered aisles.

The morrow's sun had barely laid aside his misty morning veil before the porridge pot and porringers were cleaned out and put away. Thomas was trudging soberly along to his new master's, William settling himself in front of his frame, and Catherine, bustling about in house-place and bedrooms, promised to be seated at her spinning-wheel, with all her house in order, almost as soon as they were fairly at their work for the day.

Nor was there much time lost in the preparation of meals, for though butcher's meat was only twopence-halfpenny a pound, and a stubble goose might be had for a shilling, earnings were in proportion, potatoes were still garden produce, and one day's cooking (meat and vegetables in the same pot), did duty for two or three dinners.

William's dislike to his work was not les-

sened, but his diligence redoubled. He drowned the incessant cra-craac with a song. One stocking after another left his frame, and Catherine, who had learned the art of the seamer at her uncle's, put them together for him.

Production was one thing, sale was another.

Frame-knitters had to compete with domestic hand-knitters, for knitting was still the principal occupation of feminine (aye, and masculine) hands by the dim firelight of long winter evenings, in the country especially. Women, with pails or baskets on their heads, knitted as they went along. And the prejudice against machine wrought stockings was long in dying out. Then civil war had not tended to the prosperity of trade generally.

William took his wares from one hosier's to another with very indifferent success. He was easily elated, easily depressed. At last he ventured with half-a-dozen hose to a Leicester dealer, walking all the way for lack of means to ride.

The dealer declined to buy.

Disappointed, William burst into tears. Out of compassion the hosier took half his goods, but at a most unprofitable rate.

Home he came, worn, weary, discouraged, flung his bag down on the table, and his arms also, and sobbed aloud.

"And this is all that comes of my two apprenticeships! Fourteen years of my life gone in learning two trades, and not a living to be made at either."

"Then take to a third, and don't be daunted," cried Catherine, with spirit, "all brooks don't run into the same river. You've picked up book binding without apprenticeship, make yourself master of it, and see what that will do for you. Make that crusty old bookbinder you buy your bits of books from a bid for that old press of his you've talked so much about. Surely if you could make a dulcimer out of an old box, you can mend a book binder's press."

Gradually, as she spoke, preparing his supper the while, the despairing head had been uplifted, the weary look passed away, his expanding eyes were fixed on her earnest ones, as a fresh light dawned upon him. Ere she came to an end he sprang to his feet and grasped her by the hand to the imminent danger of the bowl of milk she was setting before him.

"Ah! Sister Catherine, you are my guardian angel! You have put fresh life and hope into my heart. Mend the press, I'm sure I can. And if I could sell the old magazines I have botched up in trying my hand, I don't doubt finding customers for better work."

"Aye, Will, nothing beats trying but doing. That book," she pointed to one on the shelf, "is a proof. You only want practice and better tools to make you as good a bookbinder as Mr. Finch."

"Well, the tools I have may serve my turn a good while, if *he* threw them aside as worn out. I didn't give him sixpence for one and a shilling for another without knowing I could make them fit to work with. No doubt he laughed in his sleeve at my simplicity, but I've had my eyes open, and I've picked up more than old leaves and waste paper, old tools and scraps of leather. The learner may use what the master rejects. He cannot make the old press work. I heard him in a rage one day say it was only fit to burn. He may be glad to get rid of it. But he would not let me have it if he thought it could be set right."

"Then don't be too eager, and don't offer him more than the price of firewood. You will then be no loser," advised Catherine. "And let me see what I can do with those stockings next market day."

Acting on his sister's advice, the next day at noon he stood in front of the old bookseller's open shop, turning over the tattered portion of his stock on the window-board. Like the Turkish shops of this day nearly all

the shops in the town then were small and open, the overhanging upper rooms served as a screen from the weather, and the customer standing outside might, if so disposed, transact his business with the tradesman within.

Loose leaves of Shakespeare's poems lay on Mr. Finch's board, with plays and volumes minus their covers. William took them up, asked the price, and laid them down again as if reluctantly.

"It's no use," said he, "I cannot afford to purchase well-bound books, and my sister sets her face against loose leaves littering about. If I had only a press I might try to bind them together myself, and the last I bought likewise."

"Why not buy my old press, you should have it cheap. It has done a lot of good work for me. There's a lot of work in it yet, if it was set right. You're a handy chap, and might do it." And the cunning old eyes gleamed with anticipation of a bargain.

"Well, let me examine it. I'm not sure I could mend it, and I've no cash to waste. I don't mind a shilling for it," he said after his scrutiny.

"A shilling, indeed! I'll see you hanged first."

"Well, I don't choose to risk more than

eighteenpence. It would be dear firewood at that."

"And I don't choose to take it even for firewood."

"Then keep it and your loose scraps likewise," answered William, and turned to go.

But the crafty Finch recollected that the press was only useless lumber. There was not the ghost of a chance that the stockinger could make it work if he could not, and coin in hand was better than lumber in his little shop. He called William Hutton back, offered to let him have it for two shillings, and declared there was a fortune in the press for one who could find it.

"If you thought so, Mr. Finch, my two shillings would not be taken in exchange," quoth William dryly. "I am risking my money over it, I know. You remember Mr. Peter Webb, sir? Well, he promised to make my fortune. To my mind fortunes are not made by broken-down presses any more than by broken-down gentry. But here's a shilling as earnest, Thomas and me will come for the press to-night."

Home he went in high glee with his news of a concluded bargain, to find that his Aunt Ann had in his absence visited Catherine, no longer a widow, but the wife of the whipmaker, a man twenty years her junior.

"She hath made a whip for herself, or I am blind," remarked Catherine, "Robert Tanner hath not the meekness of Uncle George." And that was all her comment.

William set to work at once. With no more tools than had gone to the repair of the bell-harp and the making of the dulcimer, he contrived by loosening a pin here, tightening a screw there, setting the crooked straight and square, and substituting a drop of oil for clogging dust to put the old press into thorough working order. It was good as new.

"I say, Catherine," he cried, in his elation "If Mr. Finch had but guessed how I set up my own knitting-frame, and had the knack of converting old things into new ones, he would have made a harder bargain."

"No doubt he would. Men without ingenuity do not suspect it in others. Who knows, Will, but you and Perseverance together may in time find the fortune he said was hid in it."

"We'll have a try for it," was his reply as she went back to her spinning-wheel. She had only left it to inspect his handiwork and encourage him with her approbation.

What a rage the old bookbinder was in when Will submitted his first specimens of bookbinding for his criticism, and proved

that he had made the lumbering press fit for something better than firewood!

"So that's what you've been doing all along! Buying my castaway tools to take the trade out of my fingers! And I let you have them for next to nothing, and be hanged to you!"

"They were worthless to you, so at any price you were the gainer," replied Will stoutly.

"Gainer, indeed; you crafty contriver. But I'll never believe that press could be made to work, clever as you seem."

"Come and see for yourself."

He did see for himself, and flung about his snuff and his oaths in good round style, as he swore he had been bamboozled.

"You young cheat, I'd ne'er have let you have it, had I known it was good for aught but firing."

"Softly, Mr. Finch," struck in Mrs. Perkins. "If you thought *that*, *you* were the cheat to ask two shillings for firewood not worth a groat. You cheated yourself when you thought you were dealing with a simpleton. What your wooden head could not accomplish, my brother's common sense hath achieved. And now, sir, I shall be glad to be quit of your company."

Like a beaten cur old Mr. Finch went back

to his dusty den to chew the cud of bitter reflection, and resolve that never another broken up book should pass out of his shop into the hands of the young aspirant.

Time, however, brought reflection. No one else would rid him of his rubbish so profitably.

Then that he might get the books back in saleable covers for next to nothing, and though his chagrin had in no wise abated, he covered it up for the sake of bargaining. Indeed, the sly old man began to debate probabilities within himself, and to consider whether so sharp a young fellow might not be better as a son-in-law and assistant than as a rival. In that case he would recover the lost press.

Unaware of these projects, William turned to his new occupation with hope and energy. He liked its variety as much as he hated the monotony of the stocking-frame.

But he could not abandon the latter wholly. He was not yet a master of his new craft, and had but practised on old books.

He had to thank his sister for disposing of his stockings. She offered them for sale in the Market Place on Saturday as composedly as the farmers' wives and daughters offered their butter and eggs. If she could not find a ready sale where her yarn was bespoken, her

dignity and decision at once commanded respect and custom.

He had more to thank her for. When his Aunt Ann and others scouted the idea of a stockinger turning bookbinder she as stoutly encouraged him.

He rebound some of his own books, and put them in the window as specimens with a conspicuous bill, "Bookbinding done here."

This progress was slow, but it was progress; some individuals employed him because he worked cheaply, others for the mere novelty of finding a bookbinder and a stockinger in one.

Now it was that having mastered the lower branches of the trade he began to feel the want of good tools for better class work. He had none but the old things he had bought years before from Mr. Finch, and none were to be procured nearer than London. The tanners in the Narrow Marsh could supply calf skin, but not coloured kid or morocco.

He lamented this to Catherine, with the added remark, "He sells me nothing but waste leather and boards, and now he has got Miss Finch there fancies he can charge what he pleases."

"Oh," thought Catherine, "is the old fox laying a trap for my susceptible brother?" Her answer was prompt, "Then go to London, and buy better."

"How can I go? I have no means."

"Lamenting will not bring them. Sluggish blood hath been the bane of the Huttons. Our grandfather let his inheritance pass from him rather than travel from Derby to Northallerton, though his family were in sore need. And only to save himself the trouble of looking after it, father hath taken a guinea for his right to the freehold of the new Derby China works. True, *he* could not pay off the mortgage, but if he had applied to *me*, I would have found the means. Thomas *is* steady, but he would sup his porridge from the bowl to save stretching across the table for a spoon. I've more hope of you. You can ride difficulties down; but you need a spur for all that."

"But I cannot ride to London without a horse, or money for the stage. And neither tools nor materials are to be had for the asking."

"If you cannot ride you must walk. It's safer and cheaper. You've stout limbs. You tried them once on a fool's errand. Try them now on a wise one. Be ready to start in the morning; and there shall be money ready for you."

William's emotion gushed from his eyes. Wonder, admiration, gratitude paralyzed his tongue. Had ever man such a sister?

CHAPTER X.

ON THE LONDON ROAD.

One! Two! Three! proclaimed the metal tongue of a church clock. Out of bed sprang William to dress in the dark. The sun would not rise until five that April Monday morn.

There was a tap at the door, a glimmer of light. His sister must have risen earlier still.

"I have brought you a candle and a clean shirt. See, I have sewed three guineas in the neckband for security in case you should fall among thieves. They are to buy your gilding tools and other matters with. I have earned it hardly, you must spend it thoughtfully. Here are eleven shillings, all I can spare, for your use on the road. Carry that loose in your pocket. If you are so unlucky as to meet with rogues, the loose silver may save your gold. Do not put on your best suit. The better you are dressed the more you will have to pay for accommodation on the road, and for your materials at the journey's end. Fine garments suggest a full purse, and attract attention. At your journey's end they would be shabby with

dust or rain. Besides, your topcoat will serve for a cover-all."

She might have known that William had laid out his best clothes over night, to make an impression on the London tradesmen when he got there.

A little sigh accompanied his acquiescence in the wisdom of her advice, and he set his plum-coloured suit aside, though not without a twinge or two of mortified vanity—or, shall we say—self-respect.

Downstairs there was a good mess of smoking milk porridge awaiting him. A package of cheese and oaten cake to eat by the way was thrust into one big pocket; a clean shirt and stockings filled the other.

Thomas had been aroused and joined them, and then she bade her brothers kneel down while she solemnly and earnestly commended the traveller to the safe keeping of the Almighty.

There followed an affectionate embrace, in which he left a tear upon her cheek, and then, stick in hand, he turned to go; Thomas bearing him company as far as the toll-gate on the twenty-arched Trent Bridge, which spanned the stream and watery meadows both.

John Taylor, the toll-man, had come down to open the gate for a carter in charge of a heavy millstone which had been all night on

the road, and whilst taking his toll grumbled and swore at the breaker of his repose.

But when he raised his horn lantern to look into the Huttons' well-known faces, and heard that William was bound for London on foot, he set up a shout of d'smay, and said he would "surely be robbed and murdered before he came back."

It was certainly a perilous and long journey. But William assumed a bravery he was far from feeling, and replied, "I've neither coin nor clothes worth stealing; I'm not quarrelsome, and I don't drink. Footpads don't commit murder where there's no provocation, and nothing to gain."

"Brave words off a weak stomach, my man. Don't brag till you're out o' the wood!" growled the toll-taker as he turned in.

His words were not inspiriting. William's courage was shaken as well as his hand when Thomas bade him "God be wi' you."

The morning was dry if the roads were not; and it was not so dark as to make his footing insecure on the highway. And if as he strode along he feared a robber in every bush or wayside hedge, it arose from the reminder of the guineas at his throat and the shillings in his waistcoat pocket.

Let us calculate his money by the current value of provisions, let us double it, or more,

to bring it nearer our present standard ; and then admit that he was but scantily furnished for a journey on foot of a hundred and twenty-nine miles, and as many back, with a stock-in-trade to purchase in the interim. Yet he carried about him quite sufficient to tempt robbery and violence even in these enlightened days, and its unwonted possession was not strengthening to a naturally timid disposition.

Soon he lost his fears in the recollection of the former long journey he had undertaken and its different auspices.

"Ah! it's nearly eight years since I ran away from Uncle George. Nay, from Dolly Parker and Aunt Ann. Not a penny in my pocket but the two shillings I had helped myself to. A pretty mess I made of it. No matter, I 'scaped the worst, thanks to Uncle George, and I saw fresh places if I paid dear for the sight. Ah! eight years! I'm another man now, taller, stronger. If mother could rise from her grave she would not believe her ugly little lad could have grown so good looking and personable. Ah, I can pick and choose among the girls now. But Dolly Parker set my fancy free. I'm not to be caught in a trap again, even by the winning smiles of Miss Finch. There's not a woman of them all to set beside Sister Catherine. I

was a poor miserable wretch after Mr. Webb died, until she took me in hand to make a man of me. She hath upheld me when others jeered, kept my spirits from flagging, trusted me with her hard earnings; encouraged me in all ways. She hath made a man of me, and I feel it!"

He felt something else before he had gone ten miles. So long was it since he had been kept in practice by walking and racing with Martin in the Trent meadows, that now his feet were tender and blistering.

No matter. The last bat had flown to its covert, day was dawning if chilly, the dusk of night was dispersing, he seemed to be leaving it behind, there was a scent of burning peat or wood on the breeze, smoke rose here and there from cottage chimneys, the light grey eastern sky showed the first faint flushings of pink and amber, there rose a wall of white mist between him and the distant landscape, above which showed ghost-like the tops of nearer bushes and trees in all the tender green of early spring, whence came a chirping and a twittering to say that the bird world was waking up, and there would be companions for him on the road ere long.

He felt as if a new day was also dawning for him; and stepped resolutely on in spite of sore fatigue until he crossed the bridge at

Leicester and looked about him for an inn, where he might rest.

Leicester was not altogether new to him. His uncle had put up his horse at the Three Crowns. And he was soon seated in the kitchen of the inn with a pint of ale before him, a thick oaten cake and half a cheese.

To cut this he drew out his pocket knife without thinking how little it accorded with his dusty feet, his homely garb. Laying it down for a moment it caught the attention of the landlady, who made a remark about its peculiarity.

"It was a keepsake to me from an old gentleman who died in my arms," remarked William. "I set great store by it."

Half-an-hour's rest and he was again on the road, stepping out all the better for refreshment, and spinning doggerel verses as he went.

A mile or thereabouts beyond Leicester he overtook a man some years younger than himself with his head bound up in an old rag, rather suggestively stained.

The man who had bow legs and a shambling sort of gait, and discontented face, accosted him—

"Heaw fur are yo' goin'?"

"To London," was William's answer.

"So am oi," said the stranger.

"When do you expect to arrive?" then

questioned William, taking stock of the other's appearance.

"On Wensday neet."

"So do I," said William in turn, adding "What is the matter with your head? Have you been fighting?"

"What if oi han; it's no concern o' yourn."

"Not the least," assented Will, but he looked askance at the man; felt that he had got a broken crown in some disreputable brawl, and wondered if the bandy-legged fellow who seemed to lag a little behind, was minded to attack him, and had comrades lying in wait somewhere near.

The suspected rogue put these fears to flight by the voluntary statement, "Moi neame's Tommy Green, oi'm a tailor by trade, an' going to Lunnon to try my luck theere. Oi've had now't but ill-luck i' other parts. What trade are yo'?"

William hesitated, "I'm a frame-knitter and a bookbinder," he answered after a pause.

"Ho! ho! Yo' be lucky to ha' two trades. Yo' may mak a fortin' at one, if yo' starve at t'other, if yo' be na' a Jack o' a' trades an' mester o' none. Oi' con ply my needle an' thimmle wi' the best, but io'm told theere's no place loike Lunnon for a chap loike me."

"Mappen so," assented Will, but his legs moved faster than his tongue. He marched

on with a resolve to drop his companion. At the end of half-an-hour the fighting tailor asked in breathless voice, "Dun yo' meean to hold on at this rate?"

"Aye. It is best to use daylight while we have it." And on Will marched steadily, his blistered feet forgotten almost, in the self-satisfied consciousness the tailor was no match for him in walking.

In less than another half-hour they sighted the swinging sign of a wayside public-house.

"It's dommed hard work walkin' at this pace," quoth the tailor, "come in and let's have a drink! oi'm dead tired."

"Not I," cried Will, "or I might share your ill-luck," he added, as he left the thirsty particle of a man behind to wash down his fatigue in the ale can, well pleased to be rid of so disreputable a companion.

He softened his refusal by saying over his shoulder, "I shall be moving slowly, you will soon overtake me."

There was so little likelihood of that at the pace Will kept, that nine miles or so farther on he sat down by a wayside rippling brook to lave his feet and shake the dust and gravel from his shoes.

He drew forth the remains of his cheese and cake, and to his grief discovered that his knife was gone.

"I cannot have dropped it on the road; there are no holes in my pocket. That lazy tailor never came within arms length of me, he cannot have taken it. I must have left it at the Three Crowns. Good old Mr. Webb! I would not have parted with his keepsake for ten times its value. I shall never see it again. There is only myself to blame."

The loss of the knife embittered the flavour of his bread and cheese; but when he had resumed his stockings and shoes he trod down the wearisome miles none the less sturdily for his vexation.

Here we might leave him with his blistered feet to pursue his steadfast journey with never a substantial meal by the way. To spend three days in London on his feet making his purchases, packing off and paying for the secure transit by the new Nottingham carrier's waggon his precious bundle of letters, lettering and gilding tools, leather and boards, surveying the parks and sights of the great capital (St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, and the mad folk of Bedlam included), breakfasting and dining *al fresco* on half-penny bowls of frumety or soup at barrows and stalls, on bread and cheese, or bread solus, sleeping at the Horns in Smithfield. To retrace, after his three days' tramp through the town, the hundred and twenty-nine miles of rough up and down road

home, and land him in Bearward Lane with the remainder of fourpence on the ninth day without further comment, and so spare impatient readers what may seem unimportant details, but for little incidents which are not unimportant.

At St. Alban's, where was his first stoppage, he encountered in the streets on the Sunday morning the bandy-legged little tailor with his head still muffled up, his face bruised and swollen, his clothes torn.

"Ah, my friend is that you?" he cried, jocularly. "What, are you still fighting your way up? Perhaps you will reach London by next Wednesday. You calculated wrong by a week the last time."

"What if I did, I'm the loser, not yo. An' don't yo crow too soon. Yo be as loike to han' ill luck as me," retorted the man, shuffling past, half defiant, half ashamed.

"Ah, Tommy Green, I fear yours is the luck of laziness. Good-bye to you," William called after him, and went on, tickled at his own joke, thinking, forsooth, he had seen the last of the man.

Seen the last of him! When shall we say we have seen the last of any one not in the grave? It might have been better for William Hutton and Tommy Green both if they had seen the last of each other.

As if to justify the laggard's evil augury, the over-tried, self-satisfied pedestrian broke down utterly in the midst of a drenching shower before he could reach a shelter in Newport Pagnell. The strained sinews refused to do their office. He was lame. His shoes were burst and broken. The stockings he had put on new in London were in holes, his feet a mass of blisters.

He had borne hunger, fatigue, pain heroically. At the contemplation of his position, lame and moneyless among strangers, his fortitude forsook him and he wept bitterly.

"What would Catherine say if she saw me thus?" he asked himself. "Aye, or that little Tommy Green, the tailor? But they shall neither of them say I gave in. What has to be borne must be borne."

And in that frame of mind he took up his staff again after a few hours' rest.

On Tuesday he was again in Leicester, and called at the Three Crowns to ask about his lost knife.

To his surprise and gratification it was handed to him by the smiling landlady, with the remark,

"I knew the knife was yours, and a keepsake, and so I took care of it, quite sure you would be coming back some day. I never saw so peculiar a knife, and the heft is real

silver. I should know it again wherever I saw it. But if I was you I would not carry it about with me. Many a traveller has been waylaid and murdered for less."

William thanked her, paid for his ale, and in the afternoon of that day the weary and wayworn adventurer who had been absent barely nine days in all, was seated by the side of his sister Catherine's wheel on their own hearth, with fourpence laid upon the table as a sort of trophy. The parcel of goods he had despatched on the Friday, just brought in lay on the window-seat full in his view, but his strength was gone; he had no power or inclination to step across the floor and assure himself by inspection that his goods were all there and uninjured.

His tender-hearted, if strong-minded sister knelt down on the white hearth, removed the dilapidated remains of his shoes and stockings, set his excoriated feet to soak in warm water, commending his frugality and endurance at the same time.

Catherine's praises were as the breath of life to him, they sank into his soul! His jaded frame they had no power to rouse.

A hot bowl of savoury pease-porridge placed at his elbow remained untasted.

Faint and hungry he was, but past eating, as he had been when he first landed at the

Horns in Smithfield. His head drooped, his hands hung listlessly between his knees.

"Miss Finch inquired after you on Sunday," she said, partly to rouse him, partly as a feeler.

"Did she?" he answered, but never raised his head.

"You want a nice dish of tea and a rasher, and you shall have them, you need a fillip."

She was unincumbered with the senseless hoop in common wear; her movements were quick and rapid, but before his dish of tea was ready he had his "fillip."

It was a simple item of news that caused him to spring from his seat in breathless astonishment.

"Robert Tanner horsewhipped Aunt Ann last week. It is not the first time, Thomas says. And the bellman hath been going round the town to-day crying a sale of their 'goods and chattels' on next Saturday."

"Horsewhipped her? A sale?" cried William as he bolted up on his bare feet. "Uncle left the furniture to me and Thomas at aunt's death. They have no right to sell them. We must stop the sale." And he looked as if he would be off on the instant.

"The landlord sells for rent unpaid. We can do nothing. I have ascertained that."

William sank down despondingly. "Nothing in that case," he sighed. "Not even

bid at the sale for uncle's books or his old desk. All my money is gone."

Catherine poured out his tea into a small earthenware mug. The tiny handleless cups and saucers she had brought from Gainsborough were too precious for common use, as was tea itself. But she made no remark.

After a pause William broke out reflectively, "I confess I should like to have the old desk for uncle's sake. It will fetch little or nothing at the sale. Ah! that bandy-legged tailor I met on the road bade me look out for ill-luck, and here it is. But I'm not beaten. I'll see what I can earn before Saturday."

And as if inspired with a new spirit to overcome a difficulty he tossed off his tea, and turned to the rasher beside it.

Thomas came in. "So you're back," said he composedly. "Tired, no doubt."

"Tired, aye. A fine hearing this at my journey's end. All our property to be sold!"

"What we have never had we shall never miss," drawled out Thomas stoically. "Aunt Ann will feel it worst. She set more store by her furniture and chinaware than on any one of us. Who was it said she was plaiting a whip for her own back? Well, no sooner had Tanner spent her money than he began to use one of his own whips upon her. She

rues her bargain by this time. Any tea for me, Catherine?"

"This is for you," and Mrs. Perkins poured out tea for him and herself in blue-barred mugs, leaving him to help himself to the blend-corn loaf and butter, talking as she did so.

"Aunt Ann should have kept single and set up some business to keep herself while she had the money in the bank. It was only for that he married her. She is paying the penalty of her folly and blindness."

"It serves her right," put in Will, sternly. "She had no pity for others, I have no pity for her. *She* was master in uncle's time. She hath found her master now. I warrant her tongue was sharp as his lash. Will the wheals on her skin make her think of me, or poor Sam, or of little Coates, or of our sore bones when we were thrashed at her underhand instigation? She taunted you, Catherine, with having 'no home;' and said my ague was a 'judgment' on me. Think you she will recall Mr. Webb's words now, and own this is a judgment on her? Sam overheard him rebuke her. Poor Sam! I fear he hath gone to ruin. If he hath, it lieth at her door."

"Aye! so the neighbours say now she's down," quoth Thomas dryly. "There's not much pity stirring. There never is when folk come down who like her set up for saints."

There was evidently not much compassion for her on that hearth, whatever there might be abroad.

Not much compassion on the Saturday among the jocular crowd who took the polish off her bright furniture with rough handling, and appraised it and Mrs. Tanner much below her own estimate.

The two Huttons felt themselves robbed of their own, and if the oak settle, cornered chair, best table, the bureau, and the coveted old oak desk were transferred to Bearward Lane that night, William grudged the golden guinea Catherine had laid down for the furniture if he did not the two shillings at which the desk became his.

Not until his dead uncle's household property came to the hammer was he sensible how much he had calculated on fitting up a home for himself and a wife with his own portion at some future day.

And not even when he had the desk in his own possession and turned out the loose memoranda in drawers and recesses, had he an inkling how important a packet of paper lay hidden there without a tongue.

CHAPTER XI.

NEITHER SIGN NOR TOKEN.

William's venturesome journey had been noised abroad, and, taken in conjunction with the sale in Woolpack Lane, made him a man of some little importance beyond his own immediate circle. He was never better pleased than when telling a story of which himself was the hero; so over and over again he recounted to different hearers various incidents of his journey, and his sight-seeing in the Metropolis, which have or have not a place in this narrative.

A man who had seen so much in London with his own eyes and power of observation was a rarity. His travels brought him listeners, and some few intelligent customers among them, who had books with broken backs or loose magazines to be bound.

Mr. Finch soon discovered he had good reason to dread a rival, but so long as William helped to clear off his unsaleable rubbish, and in furtherance of his own secret scheme for bringing a young and cheap assistant into

his business, he begged him to let his Susannah hear this or that, and otherwise threw the girl, who was not ill-looking, into the young man's way whenever practicable.

So surely as he bought a fresh batch of old books he would despatch her from his shop in narrow Bridlesmith Gate to invite Mr. Hutton's inspection, or he would send a parcel of pamphlets or loose leaves for him to look over at his leisure; nay many of his pretexts were much more frivolous.

An agreeable girl and a good listener was sure to be welcome to William, whatever she might be to clear-eyed Catherine.

As for unconscious Susannah, she went readily enough, glad of a change from the dusty, stuffy little shop, where the snuff-box of her father was brought out for every promising customer, and in opening and shutting benevolently titilated the nostrils of the bystanders. It was a pleasant little walk for her along the shady arcades of the Market Place, where bright red brick looked down in impertinent youth on aged timber and rubble, on to the smiling outskirts of the town, where the few dwellings in Bearward Lane looked out on sweetly scented fields and gardens, and on hedgerows redolent of hawthorn and honeysuckle. True, there was a burial ground in the lane but that was a bower of green.

Then every dwelling had its long plot of ground in the rear, and thrifty Catherine turned hers to good account. There were rows of cabbages and parsnips, peas and beans, herbs for the pot or physic, counting the sweet thyme and brilliant marigold, and quite a gay bed of flowers beneath the window. The lane has become a street and mounted another name, and if the abode of Catherine Perkins still has possession of the soil (which I question) it has no such aspect or such fragrant odours for its inmates, as made the errands so delicious to Miss Finch.

She watched Catherine at her busy wheel, William stitching, pressing, pasting, sprinkling, gilding, and now and then lent him a helping hand or gave him a hint of which she said nothing at home; and did it all with so much unaffected goodwill, that Mrs. Perkins, from regarding her at first with suspicion, began to take her into favour.

Between his two trades William managed to keep himself and to increase his stock, but the living was very poor, and sales were not so frequent as he could wish.

He had already turned his thoughts towards Southwell, and taking counsel with Catherine, bent his steps thither through the forest, with a parcel of the trash he called books, one Saturday about Michaelmas, and found a

pretty good sale for them among the market people. Before the day was over he had made the circuit of the little town, inspected the ancient ruins of the Archbishop's palace, taken a survey of the great church with its one cumbrous square tower and two angular spires, found a little empty shop near the Market Place, hired it for the year at the large rental of twenty shillings, and went back considerably elevated in his own importance.

About a hundred-weight of re-bound rubbish denominated books were sent by the carrier, along with tools and a few boards for shelves. He was his own carpenter and decorator, as well as his own salesman, and when he had ranged his stock ready for customers, he looked around him with a feeling something akin to the discoverer of a new country. He was the first bookseller the town had known. He had brought literature within the reach of the natives of Southwell!

It was a sleepy, drowsy, half-dead place; but loitering rustics who could tell the time of day, or prognosticate the weather from the aspect of the heavens above and the vegetation on the earth beneath, yet did not know a letter of the alphabet, loitered to watch him at his work, and lads with sun-bleached heads put them in at the door and grinned at the

strange sight, or contemplated glaring red and yellow unfolded frontispieces with open-mouthed astonishment.

In great cities persistent gazers attract passers-by to form a crowd, so the moneyless starers to whom books were sealed mysteries, drew thither others better informed and supplied. At night he went back with six or seven shillings and an order for a couple of new school-books.

The order came from a tall, thin, restless-eyed man, who seemed to have shrunk within his clothes, in the long wear he had given them, and the heavier wear there had been on his body and mind.

He said he was the schoolmaster, and gave his name as Field.

Up to that moment busy William Hutton, preoccupied, had not given one thought to his old flame, Dolly. At once it leapt to his mind that she had married this schoolmaster's son. Without premeditation he was tempted to say,

"I believe your son married an old acquaintance of mine, Miss Parker, a lacemaker. Are they doing well?"

The old man's thin lips quivered, his long, lean fingers worked tremulously round the handle of his walking stick.

"Do not name them, sir! He is idle and wilful, and she is thriftless. Where they are

I know not. My son hath been the curse of my life. I never wish to see his face again."

"I do not think I ever saw your son. I am sorry I introduced a painful subject. Miss Parker" (not Dolly) "was a near neighbour, that was all."

And with that apology William bowed out the old schoolmaster, who went along muttering and gripping his stick, as if his fingers tingled to lay it about the back of some one —it might be his unworthy son.

"Thriftless," repeated William to himself, as he closed his new shop. "Thriftless!" he murmured, as he took his empty bag and stick and set off on his homeward trudge of fourteen miles. "Thriftless! She would never have suited me. A thriftless woman is a clog to an aspiring man. I do not envy Francis Field, whatever he may be. What a narrow escape I had! I may thank common sense and Mr. Webb for that."

Neighbours, and that was all!

For a mere neighbour the subject kept pretty tolerable possession of his ruminations as he marched on under the cover of dusk, under the shining stars, under the brown and russet leaves of the sombre forest, little thinking how oft his good friend Mr. Webb had traversed the same wild road, or what that gentleman could have told of Francis Field.

No, he was thinking more of his own wisdom in repulsing Miss Dolly, and wondering if he should ever come across her or her husband.

It was ten o'clock when he reached home with the record of his day's doings, and he had been five hours on the road. He had started at five in the morning, and had not reached his shop until ten. He had banqueted on bread and cheese and a pint of ale (ale, mind you, not an adulterated subterfuge), and, as may be supposed, he was hungry enough to relish the bowl of milk porridge Catherine had ready for him.

His long and safe journey to London had given him courage to meet the dangers of the road, or rather to make light of them as non-existent, but he changed his opinion before he was much older.

He had taken his shop at Michaelmas, with the winter before him, and a wet winter it proved. Nevertheless, wet or fine, hail, rain, or snow, he tramped to Southwell and back every Saturday, sometimes bearing a heavy burden, sometimes with empty bag, but never with more than a few shillings in his pocket. More than once he passed suspicious looking characters in the forest at night, but they rather seemed to avoid than to molest him.

It, however, caused him to lock up his

silver knife in the old oak desk, that he might not be seen to use it in his shop, and so invite robbery on the road, as the Leicester landlady had suggested,

The very next day, trim and speckless Lawyer Bulwell stood beside his counter with a parcel of penal statutes he required binding together.

Will was regaling himself on inevitable cheese and bread, and laid it down together with a common clasp knife bought that morning from a Sheffield pedlar.

Mr. Bulwell took it up to cut the string of his parcel.

Had it been Mr. Webb's knife what revelations might not have been made!

How much may hang upon the most trivial act of daily life. Trivial? Is any act trivial? Can we calculate the consequences dependent on a word said or unsaid, nay, on a tone, the lifting of an eyelid?

Had the knife of his client lain there to be recognized, Mr. Bulwell would have pounced upon it, and cut the knot of a painful mystery in which great issues were involved.

As it was, the man to whom "Peter Webb's" person and lineage were familiar, stood face to face with the younger man who had helped to carry the dead "Peter Webb" to his grave, and there was neither sign nor

token of mutual interest in his fortunes or his fate.

Nay, Lawyer Bulwell became the purchaser of two odd volumes of the "Universal Magazine," newly bound and exposed for sale, and although Peter Webb's autograph was inscribed therein on a monthly part or so, no perception of original ownership was awakened.

Weeks went on; he had orders for binding which he executed at home, and for books to be obtained from larger traders in Nottingham, yet his profits were small, and but for the patrons who sought him out as the stocking-knitting bookbinder, his perseverance and his cheerfulness would never have held out.

Still he went and came bravely until his new courage received a shock one morning towards the end of November. It chanced to have been fine overnight with a touch of early frost about. The air was sharp and invigorating. The moon, now lost among clouds, now shining like an oval shield in a clear firmament shed a fitful light upon his path, as her slant rays were broken by the interlacing tracery of branching beech and elm and oak, bare and denuded as they were. The crisp brown leaves rustled under his feet, the odour of decaying vegetation greeted his nostrils, but he carried his light bag over his

shoulder, and stepped out briskly, being lost in the composition of a humorous poem, his common antidote to loneliness and low spirits.

So much was he absorbed that he neither heard the crackling of dry twigs, the crunching of old whins and dead leaves, nor the steps of men. Suddenly, where a blind path crossed the road as if a short cut from Bestwood to Arnold, an abrupt gruff "Hillo!" startled him to consciousness.

He was confronted by four deer stealers, three men and a lad, whose wide-brimmed hats worn low on their brows kept their own faces in shadow.

There could be no mistake, for slung between two, upon a long thick stick borne on the shoulders, hung a fine dead buck; and the men carried guns.

The meeting had been equally unsought by all.

There was no passing scot-free. His bag was plucked from him. A rough hand gripped him by the collar. A long hunting-knife glanced in the moonlight as if about to descend.

William thought his last hour had come.

"Don't, don't?" he cried in alarm. "My God! You would not murder me! I have done you no harm."

"Stay," interposed one of the other men, apparently younger and decidedly taller.

"No bloodshed! He's harmless enough. The fellow hath not courage to stay the stick that beats him. Let the cur go."

"A cur con gie mouth. I'd as lieve be hanged fur a mon as a buck," growled the other, with the knife still close at William's breast.

"For God's sake, friends, be merciful. I'm but a poor hard-working man. I'd not betray you for the world."

Whilst he thus implored in an agony of terror, his bag had been overhauled. There was a low laugh of scorn from the men bearing the deer.

The taller one, who had stopped the ruffian's hand now whispered in his ear, "Curse you, let the chap go. He's almost dead with fright. He's only that soft bookselling fellow. Do you want to hang us all?"

Hope rose in William's breast at the altercation, though he could not distinguish a word.

"If you only let me go, I'll give you my sacred promise not to betray you. I'll take a solemn oath to hold my tongue."

"Then see yow dun, or we' cut it from yowr throat one of these neets, and be d——d to yow!"

The man gave him a shake as he let him go. Another cried, "Torn out his pockets."

A paper of bread and cheese, a few copper

town-tokens for change, his new clasp-knife, and loose scraps of manuscript poetry were all.

The knife and coppers went into the pocket of the lad. He was allowed to gather up his bag and books, and with a blasphemous warning not to look back as he went, was hurried off with a parting admonition not "to blab."

Look behind? Not he! Fast as his legs would carry him he ran, with many a stumble as he went, thankfulness for deliverance uppermost in his mind, curiously blended with self-content at his own prudence in leaving his silver knife safe in the custody of his desk.

As the moon went down and darkness increased so did his trepidation; he was still in the dense woods, with the common danger of losing his path and becoming entangled among a labyrinth of tree trunks. But he feared the trees less than those they might harbour. The first glimpse of dawn shone in his face as he crossed the stepping-stones of the Dover Beck, and by the time he reached Oxton he was in a more composed state of mind. Good part of his way from the village lay over a common thickly sprinkled with dark groups of yews and scented junipers, but security came with daylight, and when he opened his little shop at ten o'clock he was himself again.

In the course of the morning a lady and

gentleman, with a footman in livery behind them, stopped at his shop window and turned over his stock of pictorial books for children, selected one or two, asked for a child's horn book or battledore, were supplied with the latter, paid for the books, and were turning away when up came trim and dainty Mr. Bulwell.

Off went the old gentleman's three-cornered hat to emphasize a deferential bow.

"Your servant, Madam West, your servant Squire. Hope I see you well? How thrives the son and heir?"

"Oh, hearty!" responded the gentleman. "You must come over to the hall and see him."

The lawyer again bowed. Said he should "feel honoured," when the lady—apparently about six or seven and twenty—remarked with a look of anxiety,

"I suppose you have had no tidings?"

"None whatever, Madam. I wish we had. I am placed in a situation of grave perplexity."

"And we also!" said the handsome and well-dressed squire, who seemed to be a few years older than his wife.

As this passed in front of William's open shop he could not fail to hear. But the words had no import for him.

Looking at them as they stood there he was struck with the remarkable resemblance between the Squire and Madam, and long after they had gone their features haunted him, but only as something dimly remembered through a dream.

It had been thawing all the day, towards evening rain set in, a perpetual soaking drizzle. He closed his shop earlier than usual, hoping to get through the forest whilst there was a chance of meeting country people returning from Nottingham market. But he had to plough his way through sodden leaves and slushy soil with the morning's encounter fresh in his mind; and when he threw down his almost empty bag upon the window seat at home his sister remarked,

"I think you will find the roads too heavy for you this winter."

"So do I," he said, but not a syllable of his meeting with the deer-stealers, though his tongue tingled to take his clever sister into his confidence.

And not a word said he to Thomas though he shared the same bed. His promise and the desperate threats of the men put a padlock on his very open lips.

The unpleasant adventure served to ripen a project, already in his mind, which only wanted time to mature.

His Southwell shop had only been an initiatory venture for a bolder undertaking often discussed by Catherine and himself in the absence of Thomas, or, what was much the same, whilst he sat poring over a book in the chimney corner.

He was ambitious and sought something more than a bare subsistence; and he knew that it must be sought elsewhere.

Through his daughter old Mr. Finch learned that William's weekly tramp had grown wearying and distasteful, and at every pinch of snuff he rapped his box with his knuckles with an air of decided satisfaction, as if his own plans were ripening fast.

Whether they were or were not there was a dormant feeling ripening in Susannah's breast, unsuspected by herself, calculated upon by her calculating father as the pivot on which his own project was to turn.

He chuckled to himself as William laughed and chatted to the girl when business took him to the bookseller's shop, and was extra gracious, but he never 'bated a penny from a bargain, and never said a word of his latent scheme; though he took care to let the young man know how quick and clever a book-stitcher Susannah was.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HUT ON THE HEATH.

William Hutton, ignorant of Mr. Finch's scheme, was turning over in his own mind the idea of quitting Southwell and Nottingham both, and starting life on a wider field.

The adventure in the forest had shown that the danger of travelling early and late was a stern reality. He cared little for the discomforts of wind and wet, but a keen blade in the hands of a desperate ruffian was not to be thought of without a shudder by one who had felt its point at his breast.

His project had no time to cool.

Just three weeks later, as he took his usual way to Southwell, with about thirty pounds weight of books and paper in his bag, and neared the bye-way to Oxton, he was startled by the distant report of a gun, followed speedily by another and another, then a whistle and a loud halloo.

He stood stock-still for a few moments, hesitating whether to proceed or to retreat.

As he went on slowly and cautiously,

dreading another encounter with poachers, a tall, long-legged man rushed passed him at flying speed, and was lost in the gloom of the woods.

"What deed of darkness hath been done?" murmured William, as he again stood still. "What horror or danger shall I encounter if I go on? The sound came Mansfield way. Should I go seek it out, or send people from Oxton? I have no weapons but my stick. I have Mr. Bulwell's books in my bag. I am not called upon to risk my life or his property by my own rashness. Prudence is a safer guide than valour."

So thinking he turned into the Oxton bye-way, which swept away from the Mansfield track with a north-easterly curve.

It was about eight o'clock when he crossed Dover Beck, and ere he had gone many paces farther he saw before him in the grey twilight, about thirty yards ahead, a group of keepers with dogs and guns emerge from a blind path to the left, forcing before them a youth and a thick-set man bound together. The former had a red handkerchief tied round his thigh, and seemed to drag himself along with difficulty, venting curses on his captors and his own ill-luck at every step. They were followed by two more keepers, one of whom leaned on his comrade for support, and

seemed in worse case than the poacher they had in charge.

Two more fellows, apparently woodcutters by their gloves and billhooks, brought up the rear with a fallow deer between them. It was clear the men had been taken red-handed in the act.

William was hurrying forward to satisfy his curiosity when he heard the wounded deer-stealer, in a voice not to be forgotten, and with fearful imprecations, denounce vengeance on the head of "that beggarly bookseller, whose blabbing tongue had brought them to that pass; he'd better look out for his own throat if they had to swing."

He stopped short. He had no desire to be recognized and confirm suspicion by his presence. Discretion overmastered curiosity.

Thus though he caught the keeper's "What bookseller?" he lost the disclaimer that the credit of the capture was due to any one or anything but the keeper's own sagacity and the flagrant bravado of the criminals.

He knew they were hauling the poachers to the nearest Justice, and was half inclined to follow, but the stoppage would delay the opening of his shop, and he was already late. He must wait until he returned in the evening to learn results.

How does news travel in remote places?

Before his shutters had been down ten minutes, a horseman in the yellow livery of the Wests rode up in hot haste to Lawyer Bulwell's, left some message at the door, then on to the schoolmaster's with some intelligence that caused the old man to stagger back with his hand to his brow and lean against the door-post for support.

His first call had been at a doctor's, his last at the King's Arms; but before doctor, lawyer, and servant rode off down the road to Oxton, and the long thin wiry limbs of Mr. Field were bearing him in the same direction, it was buzzed about the market, for transmission to farms and villages afar, that four deer-stealers had been surprised in the forest by the keepers, that there had been a desperate struggle, one of the keepers was half-killed, and one of the poachers shot. This man, a notorious ruffian whose name was Harris, had been secured, along with his son. The other two men had escaped. One was conjectured to be a slippery old fellow named Tom Booth, a Nottingham whitesmith, who knew every nook of the forest, and had always contrived to elude the vigilance of the keepers, generally getting clear off with the game. And the keepers were ready to affirm that the fourth man was no other than Francis Field, the Southwell schoolmaster's son; there was not light to see

his face, but his height and his long legs were not to be mistaken. He had not been seen about the forest of late years, but his associations and his antecedents were pretty well known.

These were substantially the facts, though rumour dressed them up with many variations.

All morning William Hutton was in fear lest he should be called upon to say what he knew of the men, having heard himself referred to. Whilst the other two men were at large he preferred, for his own sake, to keep a still tongue in his head.

As the day passed, and he heard that father and son had been sent to Nottingham prison to await the next gaol-delivery, he said to himself.

"Ah, the old ruffian knew he would tighten the cord round his neck if he set no better guard on his words. He found he had made a slip over 'the beggarly bookseller,' and has drawn in his horns."

He closed his shop betimes, eager to be home again with his budget. As he crossed the common he met the old schoolmaster with his head bent low on his chest, walking along in a deep, sad reverie, and leaning heavily upon his stick.

"Good-night, sir," observed William in passing, but Mr. Field went on as if he neither saw nor heard.

"Poor old man," said William to himself, "he seems two years older since yesterday. Was that his son, I wonder? He was like a long-legged giant flying past me. What a shock the suspicion must have been to a man so much respected. A bad son is indeed a grief to his father! And his wife? Poor Dolly, she deserved something better than a poacher, after all. I hope, for her sake, some mistake hath been made."

He arrived home an hour earlier than ordinary to find both Miss Finch and his Aunt Ann with Mrs. Perkins, all three talking over the capture of the notorious deer-stealers—who had been brought through the town to the old gaol on the mittimus of Justice West—and of the dangers he ran going through the lonesome forest, when only thieves were about.

He had not much belief in his Aunt Ann's new solicitude. He had more faith in the few words Susannah Finch greeted him with: "I'm glad you're safe."

His aunt had kept away from them so long as her money lasted. Now that she was not always sure of a meal, she came to recount her woes to Catherine, and share whatever she might have to set upon the board, though not always without ungracious comments on the humble fare.

Weary though he was William was quite

ready to take Miss Finch home; his notions of gallantry being different from those of Thomas, who sat in the chimney-nook reading without a thought beyond it.

Old Mr. Finch blinked his eyes, rubbed his hands, tapped his snuff-box lid, took a pinch expressively, and handed the box to William. Matters were going on swimmingly, he thought.

The conversation had been more of the risks William ran alike from the weather, dark roads, and bad characters than of love, unless the interest the girl evinced in his well-being might lead to it.

He had kept silent respecting his own encounter with the men in custody, but the general fears of others strengthened his own desire for a change, not such a one as was contemplated either by Mr. Finch or his more genuine daughter.

After many debates whether William should bribe fortune in London or Birmingham, between Catherine and himself it was decided that the former place was too far removed from his kindred; too far to remove his stock, and that there would be no room for a tyro who had not served a legal apprenticeship. The other was not only nearer, but it was a *free* town where a man might set up in any trade he liked, and push his way with the rest. So

the end of February saw him once more in Birmingham, not as a fugitive seeking refuge, but a resolute hearty man in his twenty-seventh year on the look-out for a better opening in life, with a small stock-in-trade as a foundation. Moreover, he had means to pay for such accommodation as he sought, though it was certainly humble.

He looked round with all his senses alert. Found three booksellers already established, but was again impressed with the size of the town, the throng in the streets, the spirit and activity of the people.

"I may make my way here before these great men see a beginner in so small a scale. If they do, I may excite a laugh, but not envy. An ant is not worth destroying."

He looked in at the door of the Golden Stocking, on Francis Grace, there papering up a parcel of hose.

"Can I serve thee with anything?" asked the Quaker, civilly.

"Nothing, sir."

"Then don't thee block up the doorway. It is unfair."

William moved away with a smile. He recalled his very different expulsion from that doorway years before. And then his thoughts went off at a tangent to the pretty little damsel chasing her hat over the green-sward

by Markeaton Brook. "She must be quite a woman by this time," he said. "I hope she does not take after her short-tempered uncle."

Why she or her temper should concern him, he did not pause to reflect, and could not have told had he been asked.

He had traversed the town, main streets and bye-ways, had made inquiries about rents, levies, and so forth, and left it the following day so well satisfied with the prospect before him that he determined to indulge himself in a little trip to his maiden aunt's at Swithland, and his uncle at Mountsorrel, little foreseeing the consequences to follow that unpremeditated detour.

The most direct route to Nottingham then lay through Tamworth and Ashby-de-la-Zouch. But making inquiries at the former place (where he refreshed himself magnificently on the produce of a penny) he was instructed to follow a certain road as far as a place called Pipe Hall, on the border of Leicestershire, and then "ask his way."

Well he knew the road to Mountsorrel either from Derby or Nottingham, but, alas! for his confidence in the direction of casual wayfarers. He soon discovered that he had plunged into a labyrinth of zigzag lanes and pack-horse tracks crossing and intersecting so deviously as nearly to double the actual

distance, there being in fact not even the pretence of a direct road half a century later. From one village he was passed on to another by rustics who hardly knew the world five miles from their own doors, and though some of these could tell him he would have Charnwood Forest to cross, not even the last cottager he asked had the sense to suggest how closely he was upon it, though the evening was growing dusk, and rain had begun to fall.

Through the straggling village he went on the look-out for a wayside public-house where he might rest for the night.

He had left the last cottage behind, but no light streaming from door or window indicated the hospitality which is open to all who can pay.

The dusk had deepened almost to dark, when it suddenly occurred to him that the shadowy hedges had fallen away, and the ground was exceptionally rough and uneven. Then he stumbled over a bush of gorse or butcher's broom, and scratched his hands in an effort to save himself.

He was already in the forest, on a treeless, trackless waste, in the pitiless rain, without a star or a light to guide him through the darkness.

To return was as hopeless as to go on.

Sherwood was densely planted with trees, and there was many a hollow trunk to shelter a benighted traveller who was not inclined to mistake an owl for a bogey. But Charnwood was for miles an almost treeless waste, beset with huge rocks, here and there falling away in sudden precipices, and inlaid with pits and quagmires equally to be dreaded in the dark.

William's ready stick as he felt his way, hoping against hope to find a shelter, told him thus much, and filled the night with terrors worse than rain, fatigue, or hunger, and they were not comfortable companions. He shouted aloud for help—only his own voice was heard.

Once or twice he set his back against a mass of rock, and as he rested tried to calculate the miles he had travelled that day, and the chances whether he should perish of wet, and cold and hunger, as many a forlorn traveller had done. There was no estimating distance save by weariness, and the stiffness of his limbs.

"This will not do!" he cried, rousing himself with an effort. "To drowse here is death. I must keep in motion until daylight, whatever comes of it." And putting his hands to his mouth he gave a loud halloo.

Again he was on his feet, feeling his way

at every step, soaked through with the pelting rain, which mocked his misery. Again and again he shouted, there was no reply. Suddenly a dark shadow which he had taken for another rock resolved itself into a hut.

"Thank God!" said he. "However rude, there must be a refuge here."

As he approached he dimly discerned what seemed the gigantic figure of a man faintly outlined in the lesser gloom of the open doorway.

His steps were arrested by the sharp demand in the harshest of tones,

"What do you want here? Who are you?"

William answered the latter question first.

"A forlorn and benighted traveller. I seek a shelter for the night."

"Then seek it elsewhere. There's no shelter for you here," was the repelling answer.

William had drawn a step or two nearer.

"Surely you have not the heart to deny me a cover from the inclemency of the storm?"

"Keep back, I say. The storm is not more inclement than the pitiless wrath of man!"

William moved, but not backward.

"If you shut me out on this desolate heath you will have my death to answer for."

He thought he saw the man give a swift shudder, and took courage. He edged himself nearer. The man had made no reply.

"I have been on foot since daybreak, have lost my way. Unless you let me in I shall drop where I stand. You will find a corpse on your threshold when you rise in the morning."

William thought he heard a woman's voice within. The man answered never a word. But the suppliant half fancied there was a movement of the giant's limbs and shoulders nearer to the door-post. At all events there seemed to be a gap. He was inclined to take silence for consent.

"Ah, master, I thought you would not let a fellow-creature perish close to your home. Thank you for making way," William said, as he edged himself into the hut.

As he passed he thought he heard the man mutter between his teeth, as if in stifled despair, "Home! My God! Home!"

The darkness within was scarcely less than the darkness without, though there was a low fire smouldering on the flat stone which served for a hearth, just a peat or two with a glow at the heart.

It served, however, to give him an idea that he was in a room not more than ten feet square, and that there was apparently such another room beyond.

On a rude bench huddled two women, close to this apology for a fire, not sufficient indeed to reveal their faces.

There were a couple of three-legged stools on the opposite side, and William, unassisted, possessed himself of the one nearest the fire.

The man still propped up the door-post, regardless of the rain.

As the cold rough blast came tearing over the waste and threatened to unroof the hut, William felt that a closed door would have been more comfortable for those within, but the man seemed as insensible to the wind as to the common rights of others.

Very little was said. William was the chief talker. He told how far he had journeyed that day, how he had been misdirected, whither he was bound, how slight had been his noonday repast, and wound up by saying,

"I should be very thankful for anything in the way of food. I am almost famishing."

"So are we," said the younger woman bitterly. "We han' nothing but a little pease porridge, an' that is too thin to offer yow." Her tone was subdued as if modulated not to reach the man in the doorway, but there were notes in it which struck upon William's ear with a faint familiar ring.

"Hunger is not dainty," he replied. "Any-

thing would be more acceptable than starvation."

"Aye," she muttered in a still lower tone as she rose from her chair to put a pipkin on the fire, "even honest work."

With her ragged petticoat she fanned the peat to a glow. As she did so the man closed the door, and took the seat she had quitted, offering a rough apology to William, and pleading poverty as an excuse for his incivility.

"I have had all my garden and outbuildings wrecked by rioters," he said. "I did not know but you were one of their spies, and that, perhaps, you might bring them down on, us again to-morrow to deprive my wife and children of the only shelter we have. To say nothing of our cousin here who has lost father and brother both, and has no friends but us."

As William expressed his sympathy, the wife, moving about in the dark, brought some bowls and laid them out on the hearth, where they were only dimly visible.

"Here," said the man, "you need a light to pour it out by. We must try the old substitute for a candle." So saying he stretched his long arm past William, reached a tattered book from a shelf in the corner, and tearing out a handful of leaves, twisted them, and set

them alight; then, the bowls being supplied—not filled—he pitched the remaining paper on the fire where it flashed up in a brief flame.

He had barely tasted the lukewarm pease-porridge, when by its light he caught a glimpse of the woman opposite, or all that her slouch hat did not hide. That transient glance destroyed his appetite. She had a hare-lip (a common deformity then), and its effect in eating was hideous and repulsive.

Had not the flame died down instantaneously, and left all faces in deep shadow, not even his hunger would have enabled him to swallow another mouthful.

The bowls emptied, the man became conversable, and after a while there was a move to the room beyond. By the light of another flaming leaf, William could dimly discern the shape of two bedsteads, the head of one serving as a screen from the other, whence came the low regular breathing of childhood.

"That is the best couch we have to offer you," said the man, "and we are not rich in bed furniture."

"Ah," cried William, "the dry sacking is preferable to the wet heath on a night like this. I must have perished but for your humanity. Hark! how the rain is battering on the thatch!"

All was now dark; he lay down on the

sacking-bottom, with his head on a bundle which served for bolster and pillow both. A garment of some sort was pitched over the bed-head to him.

"Cover yowrsen with that," he was told, and he obeyed.

Fatigued as he was he could not at once fall asleep. All around him was strange and mysterious. He did not fear robbery, he had so little to lose. What he had seen betokened the direst poverty, but he took it for the outcome of indolence not of dishonesty. The man's language was not that of a labouring rustic. A scrap of the lighted paper had fallen on his knee. Removing it, he saw by its own flame that it was torn from a Latin dictionary. What should bring a Latin dictionary there? And what was there in the younger woman's voice that struck a chord of memory? He wished he had seen her face. And between his cogitations, and the beating rain, and his thankfulness for shelter, he was kept awake.

What face was that the morning light revealed to him?

CHAPTER XIII.

"IN POVERTY, HUNGER, AND DIRT."

WILLIAM awoke the next morning with a chilly impression that the cloak or petticoat flung to him over-night as a coverlet had been suddenly withdrawn, and that some one had whispered close to his ear, "Be cautious! Take no notice!"

Had he been awake, or dreaming? No one was there, but the words were clear and distinct as the tone of a bell. At all events they put him on his guard.

All the others were up. Where they had slept he could only conjecture.

In the faint morning light he could not descry a sign of a third bedstead. There was an old box, and a broken hand-basin upon it, but neither chair nor table; the squalor was appalling.

There was a noise of children quarrelling in the next room. As he entered, the elder, a black-haired lad, already breeched, though not more than six years old, struck the younger and slighter-built child who seemed

rather enveloped than dressed in the cast-off petticoats of his brother. The blow provoked a cry.

The cousin, cowering over a fireless hearth, and still concealed by her slouch hat, swore at the child. "Hang yow, hold yor bellowing, or I'll gie yow summat to cry fur."

"Nay, mistress," William could not help saying, as he beheld the little one shrink away timidly, and with an effort to choke the cry to a sob, "the little lad's not to blame. You would cry out if some one struck you."

The woman made him no answer, but a slight upward jerk of her head gave him a momentary glimpse of a vicious set of the teeth laid bare by the hare-lip, and a pair of greenish cross-eyes fixed on him savagely, whilst the brown hands laid loosely on her knees were fiercely gripped.

He shivered, said he "must have caught cold," and looked at the dead embers on the hearth. But the aspect of the woman alone caused the involuntary shudder, as he thought,

"You've a temper, mistress, as ugly as your face. Keep your hat well down. Hideousness is best covered! I think the man propping up the door-post might have interfered to protect his little one. He's a lazy lout. There seems no sign of breakfast.

And water might be as scarce as food or fuel, the children's faces are dirty as their rags. All seems dirt together. Where's the wife, I wonder? Hunger craves. Is there nothing to stop its gnawing? I must make a stir."

Thereupon, he said to the man looking sullenly out, the grime of weeks on his face and hands.

"Is there a spring hereabouts where I can give myself a wash?"

"Aye," said the man ungraciously. "There's water near enough, I wish to the d——l ale was as plentiful. My throat's as dry as an oven."

"Water will quench thirst," ventured Will. "I'd prefer a hunch of bread to subdue hunger."

"She's gone foraging to our next neighbour's, and that's a mile away. I hope she won't come back with empty hands. That way to the spring."

Will was going as directed, wondering if names were as scarce as food, and presuming that *she* meant the wife, when the youngest little lad, who had his right hand bound up in a dirty rag, ran towards him crying out, "Me go too, me be washed."

"Go back, you young imp!" the man cried with threatening voice and gesture, adding in a different tone as he caught William's look

of surprise: "You must wait till mother comes to wash you and your brother both."

The child slunk back, cowed. The man led the way to the spring, making a sort of apology for his short temper, and as Will bared his throat and laved his hands and face in the clear cold water, which came gushing up from among a group of stones, and had worn a channel for itself, remarked,

"You see, sir, I've not been myself since the rioters made havoc of the home I had planted here."

"What rioters?"

"The freeholders of Charnwood! It seems they claim certain rights and privileges in the forest, and have banded together to wreck and destroy every house and hut built on the waste and common land without their sanction. You see, sir," he went on, "I came here five years ago or more. Stones were plentiful. With a bit of help from cousin's father I built my own house, with a stye for a pig and a shed for a cow. I dug up first one patch of ground, and then another, and planted them with turnips, cabbages, and potatoes; and I fenced them round to keep out strays. And now—look what a wreck they have made!" And he took William to witness what havoc had been made of outbuildings and cultivation. But it struck

William it was not very recent. He learned afterwards it had been done the year before.

"It is all very sad," said he, sympathetically. "Could they have any legal right for the outrage?"

"Right?" cried the other scornfully. "What care rioters for right? They had the right of the strong hand. But, by Heaven! I'll be even with some of them yet. Let any man beware who does me a wrong," and he raised his clenched hand threateningly.

William looked from the ruined outhouses up at the grimy face before him, noting how the black brows met and loured over eyes like fiery coals, and wondered if the man had any right to self-appropriate the land, and how *he* should feel if rioters wrecked a house of his.

Strange was the conversation, stranger was the juxtaposition of those two men if either had but known it.

Where had William seen a face resembling the one before him, and similarly distorted with passion?

As he looked out across the sloppy waste where the recent rain now lay in little pools and spangled the herbage, pondering the query he had put to his memory, he observed a female figure rise as it were out of the

rolling mist that veiled the distant landscape, becoming more and more distinct as she drew nearer. The owner of the hut must also have seen her, for he made a move to go back for breakfast. In her hands she bore a red earthen pitcher and a portion of a loaf.

As he watched her approach something familiar in her gait and bearing claimed recognition, the very set of the gipsy hat upon her head, torn and faded though it was. And the *face*! How his heart sank. Could that thin, care-worn, lined, and dirty face ever have been pretty Dolly Parker's?

He knew whom the long-legged, angry, close-browed man resembled now—it was schoolmaster Field!

They met almost at the door of the cot. The husband bent his tall head and led the way in.

A glance of sad recognition passed between Dolly Field and William. He would have spoken, but a significant shake of the head, and a prohibitory frown at the broad-shouldered form in advance checked the words on his lips.

The warning he had heard in waking flashed across his mind. It was no dream.

He was so stunned with the discovery he could scarcely preserve an indifferent countenance.

The children had again been quarrelling, this time for the possession of a ball. It was dirty enough then, but it had been bright scarlet leather, gaily worked over with coloured silks. It was an expensive article, singularly out of keeping with its surroundings.

William pitied the little fellow who seemed to have so rough and ill-natured a brother, and somehow he saw a contrast between the boys which suggested in the black eyes and brows of the elder a cause for favouritism; and in the more delicate frame and outline of the younger one a leaning towards the mother's side, which, perhaps, might tell against the child.

The boy, as if recognizing a friend, sidled up to him. He took him between his knees, stroked the tangled light brown hair, and asked him what he had cried for.

"Fank hurted my bad hand," and he held out the one in the wraps.

"Frank will be more careful another time. But what made it bad? Did you burn yourself?"

"No, door hurted it. Oh, so much."

Talking to the boy, William did not notice the scowling face of the silent woman in the corner.

"And what's your name, little one?" pursued William, caressingly.

"Vill!"

"Will! Why that's my name."

"Not Will—Vill," explained the child.

"We call him Bill," cried Field gruffly. "Here, Peg, take the lad to your side. He's troublesome."

William would have protested against the change; but he caught another warning glance from Dolly Field as she cut the bread into thick slices; and, indeed, Peg's long brown arm had already stretched across the hearth and dragged the shrinking little one away, whilst Frank clapped his dirty hands and set up a laugh.

"A rare way to train up children," thought William. "I pity poor little Bill."

But he was glad to wash away the thought with the same draught of cold milk that washed down the slice of bread held out to him.

After gratefully participating in the scant breakfast, which he had every reason to suppose was begged, not bought, William had no excuse for remaining.

He would gladly have exchanged a few words with Dolly, but her husband still hung about, and the silent woman in the corner might be watching like a cat, for all her cross-eyes revealed.

He rose and took his stick in hand. "I am

very grateful and thankful," said he. "But for the shelter and food you have supplied I must have perished. I am too poor to make proper return. Should it ever be in my power, I shall not forget your kindness. Perhaps," turning to the great hulking fellow staring at the cold hearth, "you would not object to set me on the right road to Swithland."

"No," said Field. "As well out as in. There's naught to be done."

"Naught to be done," thought William, "with your place in ruins, and your children starving! I should find plenty to do." But he only bade them all "farewell," and stepped out.

As he reached the door little Bill came after him at a run.

"Me do with oo! Me do with oo!" cried he eagerly, and caught at William's hand.

Francis Field clutched the boy by the shoulder and gave it a rough shake, and thrust him back.

"Go back, go back I say; who wants a squalling brat. Here, Peg, take him in." The child, who clung to William, was dragged away whimpering, with a look of appeal in his eyes that haunted Will all the day. He thought he heard a blow, he knew he heard a child scream before they were five yards from the

door, and would fain have turned again to protest against ill-usage, but he remembered his own childhood and Samuel's, and feared interference might do more harm than good.

Field stalked along moodily, his hands thrust into the deep pockets of his flap-waistcoat. It had been a bright yellow once upon a time.

To break the silence, Will began, "Do you not intend to cultivate your ground again, and repair the damage done by the rioters?"

"To what end?" answered the man fiercely. "To have them wrecked again? No! Let them work that work prospers with. It hath brought no luck to me."

"Ah, my friend, much depends on the worker. I've not had much of what you call 'luck,' but I mean to persevere. 'No gains without pains,' says poor Richard, 'then help hands, for I've no lands.' I'm poor now, but whatever be my luck, it shall not be the luck of laziness—that's sure to be ill-luck."

Field eyed him askance. "Then you do not believe in luck?"

"I don't. I believe in honest hard work, that God may bless. If work does no more for a man, it keeps his joints supple, his hands from mischief, his sleep sound. Industry and thrift are sure friends. But let a man coin the sweat of his brow into guineas, if all he

earns goes down his throat or on his back, he labours to small profit."

"Humph!" sneered Field, who did not seem to relish his companion's preaching. "What have industry or thrift done for you? You seem poor enough."

"Aye, I'm no stranger to belly-ache or pocket-ache either. But I've health, energy, hope, and self-respect. All steps in fortune's ladder," responded William proudly; "and if I don't mount it before I die, it shall not be my fault."

"Self-respect? Oh, oh!" chuckled the other, to whom the early episode of the stolen two shillings had filtered through Roper and Dolly, and whose memory retained what William had overlooked—but believing himself unknown, he made no allusion to provoke personal and inconvenient recognition. Then with a quick and gruff transition, he added,

"Then mount your ladder and be d——d to you. If you were burdened with a wife and children you'd be none so nimble. You'd look out like me for a stroke of luck to land you atop without climbing."

William looked serious. Shaking his head, he said slowly and deliberately, "No, I may be older than you, but I've not been able to afford the luxury of a wife. I must have a home and a few spare guineas before that

comes to pass. I could bear poverty and hunger myself, but not the extra pinch they would give through wife or child." He was thinking of Dolly and her children, and what might have been had he yielded to temptation.

Field ground his teeth. Large, firm, white, cruel teeth they were. "Aye," he said hotly, half between them, "it was an ill-fated day when I tied myself to a wife. Yet she had a pretty face and that in her fingers which might have kept us all when trouble came had she been so minded. You say true; a wife's a burden to a man of spirit."

William wondered wherein lay the spirit of the man who had plainly expected his wife to keep him. He took him up quickly. "Nay, I did not say that. A wife must be a comfort to a man of sense. He will choose his wife for her worth, and wait till it is prudent to wed."

"All men have not your prudence or discernment," sneered Field, relapsing into his vicious mood; "and some are born to ill-luck. The devil seems to cast his club over them in the cradle."

"I tell you I don't believe in ill-luck. Hercules, in his cradle, strangled the snakes sent to destroy him. If ever the devil cast a club over a cradle it was mine. Strong will breaks the devil's club, my friend. If not broken early it may break you."

"Aye," assented the other, gloomily, "there you are right. Maybe you have faith in forecasts, if you have none in luck. An old fellow I met one day, when I was but a lad a little over eighteen, forecast fate for me with a vengeance. A chance blow with my stick ripped a bird's nest from a bush, and it served him for a text to predict all manner of evil, with the gallows to end all. One half of his prophecy came true when I stood beside a desolated home, and if I only had the old fellow here now I'd throttle him if I brought the other half to pass straightway. Ill-luck has seemed to track me ever since. But other hearths may be desolate too. I've struck an even balance."

William was getting heartily afraid of his guide. He clutched at the empty air as if it were a human throat, and such a demoniac light seemed to flash in his eyes, as made the peaceful traveller's flesh creep, and brought back the sensation of the deer-stealer's hand on his own throat as he had felt it in Sherwood. With that came the remembrance of the man's voice who had interposed to prevent bloodshed, but gratitude for a past benefit did not prevent uneasiness.

The morning was fine after the rain, though the sky was a dull grey. They had been traversing a region without a track, where

stones were more plentiful than trees, where the few oaks were hollow and stunted, and little besides the alder and the holly kept possession of the soil, where a century before the foliage had been so dense in summer-time as to keep out the intrusive sun. Great jagged rocks cropped up here and there, and when the mist cleared away, there were wooded parks visible in the distance. Farther still away in the north and west, the swelling outline of high hills broke the line of the horizon, dim and misty, like clouds saluting clouds. Near at hand all was waste where even the few scurrying rabbits seemed companionless.

William remarked it, to turn the unpleasant conversation, but it only served Francis Field for another outburst.

"Aye, curse the rioters, this half the forest was alive with conies, till the brutes of colliers they got to help them tore up the warrens and killed them all. There's naught left for a man to live on now; and we're not to call it ill-luck." His lips curled with intense scorn, and he ground his teeth after the bitter words.

"My friend," said uncomfortable William, in a conciliatory tone, though not unmarked by apprehension, "are you certain of your road?"

He had observed that certain landmarks

shifted their position strangely, and his doubts of his guide suggested that he was for some sinister purpose being led astray. The man had no mind that William Hutton should have a clue to the whereabouts of his own rude dwelling, but he did not say so.

"Know the road? Aye, blindfold. You may thank your lucky stars you had me to guide you. Look ahead. Yon's Swithland Wood. Make for it, straight as you can. You will come across a beaten path half-a-mile or so away. That's your road. And this is mine."

He was turning away. "Stay," cried William, "you gave me the shelter of a roof and food to stay my hunger, and have set me on my road. Here's sixpence for you. I am too poor to offer more or you should have it."

"Sixpences have been scarce with one of late, master, or I'd have scorned to take it," was Field's reply as his fingers closed upon the coin, and they went their several ways; each thinking his individuality unknown to the other, neither desiring ever to meet again.

The one who had urgent reasons for concealment, hugged himself in the belief that the change wrought in his once pretty wife by years, distress, and dirt had been so effectual as to blind the eyes even of an old admirer. "Ugh!" grunted he, "the self-conceited ape

could see nothing but himself and the fortune he is going to make with *honest hard work!* Oh, ho! How I could have laughed at his preaching! A pitiful drudge! It was lucky for him he was blind, or he might have found his fortune at the bottom of some pool. Dirt and rags are rare disguises. Dolly unrecognized and me unknown; we're safe from him at least. That bleating little imp with his 'hurted hand' and his 'Vill,' had nearly spoiled all. But Bill Hutton suspects naught, and we're safe as a fox in his hole."

Very different were the cogitations of William as he rapidly increased the distance between them.

"Thank God, I'm quit of him. Better see his back than his face. Poor Dolly! Poor lass! She made a sad bargain with *her* pretty face. Does the lazy, lounging brute ill-use her? That warning whisper meant something. Was her fear for herself, or me, or him? What a nightmare that hideous Peg must be to her, and little Bill. Poor chap, he must come off badly amongst them, if his mother has not strength or spirit to protect him. Frank's the father's own son clearly, strong and masterful. Poor schoolmaster Field! For Dolly's sake and yours, I gave the deer-stealing rogue a strong hint to work honestly for a living. If he will not take warning

with his comrades in gaol, and the gallows before them, he may justify the forecast. Ah! Dolly, you made a melancholy mistake—Maybe the schoolmaster would help them. Poverty cries aloud. Necessity is the devil's spur. I'll sound old Field. He would never betray his own blood to the hangman. There are worse crimes than deer-stealing. Even Shakespeare called it sport in his wild young days. It all comes of hot blood and idleness. If I tell the schoolmaster the misery I have witnessed, he will surely forgive his son and help them all."

Blind William Hutton!

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE TAKEN, THE OTHER LEFT.

If William Hutton had anticipated any assistance in his projected undertaking from his well-to-do spinster aunts at Swithland, or his bachelor uncle at Mountsorrel, he would have carried disappointment home with him, and lost more than his way or his time when he made his impulsive detour from Tamworth to visit them.

Fortunately for his hungry body, the drapery and grocery shop with double-bay windows was already opened for the day. Miss Ward and her sister Mary had not arisen from their comfortable breakfast-table, or he might not have fared as he did after his early morning walk. The preparation of an impromptu meal would have disordered the whole mechanism of the household.

As it was, he came from the outer world, was sure to have a budget of news to unfold, news so precious in an out-of-the-way spot that, in spite of the inauspicious salutation, "What ill-wind brought thee hither?" the

prompt and business-like women from whose side of the family he and Catherine derived aught of energy they might possess, were willing to prolong their morning meal and admit him to a share whilst he unfolded his plans and let them know he was about to "keep a shop in Birmingham."

"Prithee take heed thy shop keeps thee," put in Miss Ward with grim severity. "Thou'lt be the first of the Huttons worth a groat if it doth more."

"Catherine's a Hutton!" he retorted sharply, feeling his sister's aptitude and energy equally impugned with his own.

"Aye, but *she* takes after her mother. She is more than half a Ward. And did not *we* rear and train her from her babyhood? Thou may thank us thy sister is what she is. Aye, and thou may thank thy Aunt Betsy, dead and gone though she be, for first putting the horn-book into thy hands, if books are finding thee a living."

William sighed. He had a reminiscence of his four-year-old self seated on a bench with his feet dangling in the air, afraid to stir lest he should fall, and feeling on his drowsy head the horn-book that had fallen from his sleepy fingers. Alpha-beta had not come to him kindly through his schoolmistress aunt.

The very servant, gaunt and grim, whose

hair had grizzled, and sprouted on her chin since he knew her first, brought in along with the coffee-cup, saucer and broiled collop of hung beef, a still less agreeable reminder of the night when she hauled him out of bed, half-asleep, and dangling him by one arm, night-shirted as he was, bumped her bony knee into his back at every step down-stairs, as she carried him to the poor mother waiting to bear him home.

He had few pleasant memories of the old red granite house where so many of his infantile months had been spent with his austere aunts. His father had then failed in business, their sister's marriage with an unfortunate trader was a crime, and his little self an encumbrance.

Remembering all this why had he gone thither?

There must have been some childish associations with the spot not wholly discordant, something apart from ties of kinship so repelling, if he could not give them shape or form.

He left Miss Ward and her sister in their twofold shop where the overflowing stock bulged from shelves, dangled from the ceiling, filled canisters and drawers, and opening the black half-door went down the well-worn step into the street, bearing with him messages for

Catherine and their own bachelor brother two miles away at Mountsorrel, but nothing more, unless advice and admonition were to count as valuable gifts.

He would scarcely have climbed the rocky street to his uncle Ward's but for the message he had undertaken to deliver There were the same vaticinations of failure consequent on the sluggishness of the Hutton temperament, the same benevolent outpouring of advice, but not so much as a glass of small beer was offered to the nephew who had come so far out of his way to see his kin.

Perhaps they suspected him of ulterior motives. If so they were wrong. He had but obeyed a sudden impulse when he turned aside at Tamworth, the consequences of which were not for him to foresee. But something of his relatives' suspicions must have been apparent, for no sooner had he turned his back on the craggy hill and red granite houses of Mountsorrel than the idea seemed to strike him.

"Surely they did not fancy I went to seek help from them! Them? As soon ask the stones underfoot. I knew better. They did not help their own sister in her extremity, or show kindness to the little lad thrown on their compassion. Trained Catherine Aye, to make a drudge of her. Why did I waste a day coming hither?"

He stooped to pick a daffodil growing by the wayside.

"Nature is more lavish of her gold than the self-sufficient Wards. And this is all the gold I am like to carry back. A man must build up fortune with his own hand, it's little help he'll get from rich relations. But I'll show them what a Hutton can do, in spite of disparagement."

He looked up at the sky where the forenoon sun was struggling through the grey, glinting on diamond-paned casements and ruddy walls, on bright patches of rustic garden, on verdure cropping up in rocky nooks or clefts. It lit up fitfully the smiling river Soar, the long range of red hills, and a dusky mist which, when the swelling buds ripened to bursting, would be green copse or woodland vocal with the songs of spring.

For a moment he stopped to think how lovely and picturesque was the well-known scene, and how vividly the patches of fresh green grass contrasted with the dark red rock around, and he carried the imprint away for memory to dwell upon in after-time.

It was but a moment he paused for sentiment. He kept on his way northward, newly braced for the seventeen miles before him with his determination to show his cross-grained aunts that there was some mettle in one of the Huttons wherever it came from.

So it may be he had not lost his time after all.

Nor had he been so self-absorbed as to forget Dolly and her surroundings at Charnwood. Recalling his own infant troubles brought little "Vill" palpably before him, and he could not rid himself of the image conjured up. The contrast of the two boys; the shrinking fear of the one, his haste to escape from his home even with a stranger. He found himself pitying the child more than he pitied the woman. "She brought disaster on herself," he argued, "the child is an irresponsible victim. And how unlike his brother. Who *is* he like? Not his beetle-browed father, not his flaxen-haired mother; the one has a nose like a hatchet, the other a saucy turn-up bewitching to unwary young simpletons. Ah! Dolly, you gave me a taste of your tongue in time, or you might have driven me to distraction as you drove Joseph Roper. If he had but seen you with skirts rent and bedraggled, hair like fuzzy tow, and discontented dirty face, disenchantment would have cost the King a soldier. Wise Mr. Webb—How the mind wanders! What tricks fancy plays. Why did I think of dying Mr. Webb when Vill's grey eyes appealed to me? Were they really alike? Or was it the resemblance of helpless age to helpless childhood? Most probable."

Then thought went off at a tangent to his own affairs, or was diverted by objects passed on the way, but still, through all, Mr. Webb's eyes looked out of a child-face, and "I'll do vith oo!" rang in his ears.

Rain was falling when he approached Nottingham between four and five in the afternoon, rain that must have been of long continuance, for the twenty arches of the Trent Bridge spanned a flood that blotted out the flowery meadows and kept the bargemen busily anxious for the security of their several crafts moored alongside wharves, loading or unloading cargoes of coal, crockery, iron, timber, leather and other merchandise; the chief carrying of the country being along the watery highway wheresoever was a navigable river. The great canal mania had not yet set in.

The long narrow bridge was crowded. William, apprehensive of some disaster arising from the flood, accosted a packman resting against the parapet.

"It be 'sizes, mon!"

He had his answer. It was the Spring Assize. Judge and his attendant javelin men were entering the town to awe the multitude, and be met with due ceremonial by the sheriff and his posse. The rabble-rout had grown and gathered as they came.

The man volunteered an opinion.

"Theren be summat moore te gawp et afore another week, if them deer-stealers getten theere due."

Was it a coincidence or some association in his own mind that suggested to William the peculiar slouched hat of the woman Peg, in the crowd before him, and made him look for the tall head and shoulders of Francis Field?

Objects were but indistinctly seen through the falling rain, the woman kept her head well down, and had she not turned round savagely to glare at some one who jostled her William would have been doubtful.

Once seen, her face was not to be forgotten.

What brought her there? How had she overtaken him?

"You must have nimble feet and known a shorter cut through Charnwood than I found, sweet Mistress Peg, to get here first, though I did go round about to see folk who cared naught to see me," he said to himself. But even as he spoke Peg elbowed her way forward and was lost.

Catherine's wheel was going at double-quick speed. She had expected him home the night before, and her anxiety expended itself in more vigorous turning of the wheel, more rapid twirling of the thread on the

spindle. She kept her fears and her conjectures to herself, and stolid Thomas, who took the world easily, never knew she was either anxious or uneasy.

Her "Thank God you are here safe! What detained you?" was not much to say, but William kissed her with a consciousness one true heart was there to welcome him home.

And such a home, so bright, so fresh! He involuntarily stooped to unbuckle his muddy shoes on the rush door-mat in homage to its cleanliness; and hesitated to seat himself on the polished settle in his soaking garments.

"I thought you would be wet. Here are dry clothes. Put them on in the workshop, whilst I get you a warm meal." Another instance of her sisterly care, another contrast to cross Aunt Ann. A greater contrast all to the poverty-stricken home of slatternly Dolly Field.

When Susannah Finch lifted the latch an hour later to ascertain if the traveller had returned, she found him seated cosily by the fire full of his adventures (told with prudent reservations), but, although he made room for her beside him on the settle, he was also full of the risks a man encountered in a hasty plunge into matrimony. A conclusion, as she thought, precipitately drawn from a single night among poor strangers on a wild waste,

whose ruin was the work of others. Dolly's name had not passed his lips.

Susannah had come, muffled in her hood and on pattened feet, to assure herself of his safety. Her heart had fluttered with joy at the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand. She went home dejected. She was allowed to go home *alone.*

William made a very ungallant speech when she had gone.

"If Susannah Finch wants a sweetheart she should stay at home and keep her father's shop clean and tidy, and not waste her time coming here. Gadding girls don't make good wives."

"Don't be conceited. Susannah comes to see me, I am teaching her to spin. Men want more from wives than they themselves have to render. There are worse girls than Susannah." And Catherine Perkins set her face sternly as she spoke, sending her wheel round with a sudden jerk that snapped her thread.

The assizes were on, and William had a secret desire to know the fate of the deer-stealers, but he was not given to waste time lounging among gossips at street corners; he had need to work early and late to make up for time spent in travelling, and he had a mortal dread of being seen near the court by either of the men at large. He had no desire

either to tighten the noose round the neck of old Harris, nor to put his own life into jeopardy as a suspected informer.

He had still an inclination to lift the husband of Dolly out of the slough of poverty if it could be done by a reconciliation with Field's father.

Determined to use his best endeavours to effect this, he took his way through the damp and dusky forest on the Saturday, intending not only to give notice to his landlord, but to keep a sharp look-out for the schoolmaster during the day.

He might have worn out his eyes with looking. Schoolmaster Field had been buried the day before. Killed, it was said, by the suspicion of his son's share in the murderous outrage on a keeper who was doing his duty. It was the climax to a series of wild misdeeds and had broken the upright old man's heart.

He had lived alone; a solitary man with no companions but his books; no attendant but a woman for an hour or two each day.

His school was broken up for ever. His house was shut up with all it contained. There was no will. Speculation wondered if Francis Field would dare come forward to claim his father's few possessions. No one knew where he was to be found.

Lawyer Bulwell, Squire West and Madam

had seen the old man properly buried with his long dead wife, but not one of them would hold any communication with the son.

Could William Hutton have told where Francis Field might be found?

Stumbling over a dreary unknown waste in the dark night, bewildered by his guide in the light of day, he could have given only the broad clue—"Charnwood."

For that he was not asked, and it was not volunteered.

"It is damaging to claim acquaintance with a scoundrel. Ill news flies fast. Rumours may reach him without me. Yet his father's death might steady him, and they are destitute. What if I came across that cousin Peg. I might give her a hint."

He came across "Peg" sooner than expected; and she had the hint from other tongue than his.

The misfortunes of others are seldom overpowering where self is not affected. He had done a fair day's trade, given his notice to quit, and had almost forgotten the Fields in his long tramp homewards, when, on the confines of the forest, his attention was attracted to three stationary horn lanterns and several moving figures, some with spades, others fixing a gaunt black post with a significant arm outstretched.

He shuddered, and stood for a moment aghast. Little need to remind him that they stood on the brow of Gallows Hill, or the purpose of that hideous frame.

He could hear the men coarsely laughing and jesting over their work. One of them called to him, asking if he would "stand a quart, they were working for the safety of travellers like him. He might come and see the show on Monday, when Harris was strung up."

When bulls were baited in the open Market Places, when men and women were whipped half-naked through the public streets, when criminals of all degrees and classes were herded together in filthy gaols without the commonest regard for humanity, sex, or decency, when hanging, drawing, and quartering for treason were the order of the day and public executions were common, morals and manners were alike at a low ebb, and our mother tongue needed considerable cleansing when Squire Western was a type of his class. Refinement of feeling or of speech was confined to the cultivated or Christian few.

Coarseness and brutality were too common to shock or appal William Hutton from the mouths of men such as those, since he himself was not beyond the influence of the age.

It was therefore with a curious mingling of

sensations, in which pity for the felon who had held a knife at his own breast could not truthfully be said to have paramount sway, that he felt in his pocket for two or three pence to satisfy the unexpected call, when out of the darkness sprang a woman in an old grey cloak and common slouch hat to pour out the vials of her wrath and indignation in language little more choice than that of the hangman's crew.

"A show, ye brutes, yo wouldn hang up the mothers that bore ye as a show, if ye couldn get a guinea fur th' job! There's not a rogue among yow would not track a deer if he had but the pluck or the chance, or wouldn spare his bullets if his own life warr in danger. The road safer?" she set up a discordant laugh. "The very blades of grass will rise up to revenge the deed yow do in the name of the law, yow skulking, bloodthirsty villains," she cried with wild gesticulations and an admixture of oaths not to be repeated

The light of the lanterns had fallen on her face, and caused William to shrink into the shadows as he caught sight of a hare-lip and greenish-grey cross-eyes now full of baleful fire.

"It's that d——d vixen Peg Harris," one of the fellows had said to his mates when

she burst upon them. "Shu's been rampaging round th' gaol like a mad woman since shu heard that her father was to swing and that hopeful brother of hers be transported."

"I say, Mistress Peg," cried he to her, as she paused for breath, "do yow want a seat in the cucking-stool, or a flogging at a cart's tail?" and he grasped her by the wrist with a rough hand, as he spoke. "Yow had best keep a quiet tongue in your ugly mouth."

"Aye," added another, "and don't rail at the law. It hath a long arm for folk who don't know their own. If all Squire West suspects be true yow are like to be sent to Virginny after that brother o' yourn whenever he can catch yow. An' as for that long-legged Field; whose father warr buried only yesterday, let him take care how he claims whatn's left, or yow may go in company."

The woman listened with a tigerish face; then let loose her tongue again, but William had heard enough, and was off out of sight and hearing.

CHAPTER XV.

A FRESH START.

William had seen one execution, and though he had then been a little lad mounted on his father's shoulders, the lingering impression had not made him anxious to behold another.

He had made no secret of the scene he had witnessed on the Saturday night, save only his recognition of the woman, having still a wholesome dread of vindictive evildoers, and her threat of revenge on future wayfarers seemed in some sort directed against himself, or he fancied so.

Consequently he held aloof from the "show" on Gallows Hill that windy March morning.

"If I saw the jerk and struggles of the man when the cart was drawn away, I should never pass the spot night or morning without a shudder. Imagination would suspend him there and hold me fast. Let those look on who have no call that way in the twilight of dawn, or the dark of night."

He said nothing of his fear of being recog-

nized as one of the gaping crowd by the felon's unhanged associates.

Thomas said he "did not see why he should go out of his way and lose his own time and his master's just to see the bad end of a bad man, and spoil his appetite for dinner."

But Mr. Finch betook himself and his snuff-box to Gallows Hill, leaving Susannah to deal with his undusted books; and not a contortion of the miserable wretch, not an item of his "dying speech," did he spare his customers, William among the rest.

The body had been handed over to the surgeons for dissection, and the gallows removed before William, with his stick in his hand and his bag over his shoulder, trudged over the hill and through Thornywood along the Mansfield Road on the Saturday morning; but though less superstitious than the ignorant masses, he looked aside over his shoulder once or twice somewhat uncomfortably, as if he half-expected to see the dead body dangling there still, and was glad when it was broad day and the forest left behind with all its yellow primroses, blue hyacinths and anemones, its song birds and the wild game for which men broke the laws and gave their lives or liberty.

That Saturday Squire West and Madam passed his shop, both in mourning. He made

a remark to a gaping rustic at the window that they must have respected schoolmaster Field very much to put on black.

The man stared at him with wide-open eyes. "Whoy, dunna yow know? Theere i' black fur that lad o' theyrn they lost two months sin!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Will, and the man moved away as if amazed at the querist's ignorance.

William had no particular interest in either the Squire or his wife beyond that hazy impression of resemblance to some one he had known. (Catherine laughed at his imaginary likening of people to others.) They were not customers; he was not a native or a resident of the neighbourhood, he was not even a father, and so the loss of a stranger's child two months back did not afflict him or excite farther curiosity. That the word "lost" meant by death he took for granted.

He went and came—much more pleasantly now the days were lengthening.

On the Saturday following Lady Day William found the quiet town all excitement. Lads who had made holiday since the death of schoolmaster Field were running to and fro, shouting to one another to "come and see." There was quite a crowd round the close shuttered house of the dead man.

William could not forbear turning thither before opening his own shop.

It appeared that lawyer Bulwell who held the key, and the owner of the house, had together gone thither for some unascertained reason, and to their astonishment discovered that the house had been stripped of everything it contained except a few articles of furniture too heavy and bulky for secret transport.

Against the door of a great wooden press was nailed a boldly written paper.

"As my father's son and heir I have removed my own property. The landlord is welcome to the remainder for his rent.

"FRANCIS FIELD."

"It's the vagabond's own handwriting and signature," quoth Lawyer Bulwell; "I could take my affidavit of that. And no one could bar his right to remove the goods. You may think well he has left sufficient to cover the rent due," addressing the landlord. "That rogue Harris, who has been the ruin of Francis Field would have made a bonfire of the lot rather than pay a just debt. *His* debt to the gallows had been long overdue. The country is well rid of him and of his son too. I only wish they had transported him for life. But convicts do not often come back from the plantations; that is a comfort to honest men."

He turned to William Hutton—whose curiosity and something more had brought him there with others, and who stood near, thinking that, surely, now there would be a fresh start for Field, and a better home for Dolly—"You who cross the common and the forest late and early, Mr. Bookseller, may be glad they have strung the ruffian up at last, as a caution to his gang. He was no friend to wayfarers carrying property," and he cast his eyes on the book-bag. "At all events," he went on, "we have proved the mysterious noises haunting the old house at night to have been made by ghosts of flesh and blood. I hope Field will put to good use the bit of cash he found. You will soon find another tenant, Mr. Roper, perhaps one who will take the remaining furniture with the house."

William's ear caught the name. He wondered if the stout farmer-like man could be the father of his uncle's old apprentice. He knew that half Joseph Roper's assumption had its origin in the easy circumstances of his parents.

But, when William finally departed from Southwell in May the house was still empty and had an uncanny name.

In May, when the hawthorns and the lilac bushes were in bloom and filled the air with incense, William Hutton was again in Birmingham; the tenant of half a shop in Bull street, for

which he agreed to pay the enormous rent of one shilling a week.

He had put his past behind him, parted from old friends, severed old connections and associations, and torn himself with streaming tears from Catherine and Thomas to face an unknown future in an unknown town.

The latter had composedly helped him to pack his stock, his tools and his press for the Birmingham carrier, and shook hands with him on the Thursday morning with a simple "Good-bye" that said little of brotherly emotion whatever might be felt.

But Catherine Perkins, though she felt as if the home she had created was shaken to its foundations by his departure, had been throughout the active spirit to help it forward. She could not let any selfish motive stand in the way of her brother's welfare.

Only a few weeks before, during William's absence, Mr. Rudsdall, her old master, had come to her. His wife was dead, and he was anxious for her to return to Gainsborough as his housekeeper. "If not," he said, "he should break up his house rather than have a stranger to manage for him."

"Nay," said Catherine. "Here I have made a home for myself and brothers, and here my duty lies. True, William leaves to try his fortune in a more active and thriving

town, but Thomas remains, and I have another brother out in the world who may be glad of a harbour of refuge some day. I can by my spinning-wheel support myself and have a surplus if needed. And that makes me independent."

"You always were independent," said he with a smile, "but how is it you encourage your brother Will to go among strangers?"

"It will be for his good. He will be thrown entirely on himself. That will bring out his latent energies. He has aspirations. Here the people remember him as a 'prentice lad who ran away from his uncle's stick. His old friends are mostly lounging frame-knitters. He will shake them off and form fresh associations. I only wish he started with a better stock."

"Well," said Mr. Rudsdall, "if you have made up your mind there is no turning you. And, as you put it, your duty does lie here. If I break up my house I shall not keep all my library. If William will act as my guide and travelling companion to Stamford, I will pay him for his trouble, and we can talk about it by the way."

And so it came about that William, who got a thorough drenching on the way to Stamford, added to his stock about two hundred-weight of books that came packed up in

a corn-chest, and for which he was to pay but a nominal sum "when he was able."

To these Catherine had added a well-bound uniform set—the "Spectator," "Tattler," "Guardian"—about a dozen volumes in all. "These are for show, not for sale," she said as she packed them in his box; "my old master gave them to me as a token of respect, and I only lend them to you on those conditions. The better a show you make as a start, the better will be your chances. And here are some new linen aprons, they are made from yarn of my own spinning, and Susannah Finch has helped to sew them."

Then she gave him a few words of advice.

"Always wear your apron behind your counter, it will preserve your clothes, show you are your own bookbinder, and help to bring trade. Whatever you earn spend less; don't mistake profit for capital; never make a bargain to wrong another, and you'll get on, never fear. And mind, don't be too ready to pick up friends you might afterwards want to drop."

Mr. Finch had made a great splutter over his going away, and went so far as to hint at his own great intentions towards the young man, but William glanced from the open snuff-box to the dusty shelves and said: "Arrangements made must be kept."

The old fellow, hankering after the press he had almost given away, then said: "You will not want to carry the old press with you. I will take it back at a fair price. It will not pay for carriage so far."

"Thank you, no. I prefer to keep it. It would cost me more than the carriage to buy a new one. There are years of work in it yet," as he put to the proof in the after-time.

Susannah and his Aunt Ann had come to say "farewell" overnight, but though he might have noticed the reddened eyelids of the former, he made no display of more than friendly feeling. He had never been the same to her since he had seen Dolly Field in Charnwood, and if he had tendered no explanation he had not thought it necessary. Susannah had felt the change, but had no clue to its cause. And when he said "good bye" without a word to make the parting a promise of another meeting she went home to sob herself to sleep.

Indeed, it was only in leaving Catherine behind he had melted into tears. No woman was, in his mind, to be compared to her. She had been his friend, his counsellor, his prop; Susannah Finch, merely a pretty girl to laugh and chat with in idle hours.

And now that he was alone in his small shop, with the coarse voice of Mrs. Dix, who

held the other half, sounding through the thin partition, he felt *his* desolation keenly.

It was with a very grave face he set about the display of his stock in the window and on the few shelves, on one of which he mounted his oaken desk, whilst to his press he gave the most convenient and conspicuous corner. The corn chest served as a cutting and pasting table, and when at night he made himself up a bed under the counter, very little of the elation he brought with him remained to glorify his new enterprise.

He thought of the cheerful home he had left, the hum of Catherine's wheel; the warm supper of porridge always ready for him, and, weary as he was, lay awake at least an hour and wondered if he had acted wisely.

He might have left smiles and laughter behind him in Nottingham he wore so sober a countenance as he sat waiting for customers, but he took heart as he saw how many people passed, and in passing gave a glance at the window or stopped to read an open page against the glass, if only one or two ventured in to ask prices. Ticketing goods was an art unknown until the present century was more than thirty years old.

His first customer was a bright little surgeon named Dowler, from over the way, who had seen his packages unloaded, and either from

kindness or curiosity came to give him handsel.

This was about mid-day, when William had found waiting for customers so monotonous that, as a relief, he had donned an apron, and was putting his press and tools in order to rebind an old book for occupation.

The apron and the press together acted as Mrs. Perkins had predicted.

"Oh, you are a book binder I see. Have you any samples of your work?"

Samples were laid before him, taken up and examined.

"Yes, the workmanship is good. I will bring you a book or so to bind. I like to encourage a new beginner." And after offering William a pinch of snuff from a silver box, he departed.

He was as good as his word.

"Yes, this is satisfactory," said the surgeon, turning over the solidly bound volumes carefully tooled. "I will show them to my friend, Francis Grace, the hosier, he can serve you if so inclined. What is your name?"

"William Hutton," was the brief answer, the owner of the name not caring to remind Mr. Grace of the runaway 'prentice who had gone sueing to him for employment as a frame-knitter, by claiming previous knowledge.

His reticence served no end. Francis Grace had a good memory as well as himself.

"William Hutton?" quoth he to the friendly surgeon. "Aye, I heard of him when I was in Derby last. He ran away from the stocking-frame, and came seeking work from me. I fear I was harsh with the lad. I heard that he had given up the frame for book binding, and was steady and persevering; quite a contrast to his drunken old sot of a father. And as he hath come to Birmingham, well, we must give him a lift if he be a good workman and a fair dealer."

The next day saw the drab-coated Quaker in his broad-brimmed hat, surveying William Hutton's shop outside and in, before he laid upon the counter a broken-backed copy of "Fox's Book of Martyrs," and said: "Friend Hutton, canst thou put a fresh back on my old book—as thou hast taken up with a fresh trade since I saw thee last—a good, strong, calf binding; one to stand using?"

William saw that he was known and answered accordingly.

"I'll endeavour to suit you, Mr. Grace. A man generally does best that which he likes best. I took up book-binding to please myself. I was put to the silk mill and the stocking loom to please others, and liked neither. Which style of binding do you prefer?"

Specimens were laid on the counter. Whilst looking them over the Quaker said: "And why hast thou left Nottingham *this* time, eh? I know all about thy first running away, so thee may as well speak the truth now."

William's colour rose. He replied: "Well, sir, I took a liking to Birmingham. I saw the people busy, active and intelligent, and thought there was a better chance of success where no one could regard me as a Jack-of-all-trades, if I proved myself master of one.'

"Is that a hint for me to be silent on what concerneth me not, eh? At all events there is a ring of truth in that thou sayst. I have moreover heard a good report of thee in Derby, and am moved to help aspiring industry. If I can honestly commend thy work, I will for the sake of thy respected kinsman, George Hutton, the stockinger, with whom I had many dealings. It may be for thy own sake also, if I find thee deserving." And having selected a pattern, the well-intentioned Quaker went his way.

The little air of patronage was unnoted by Will, or only noted as encouraging. Very few then dreamed of despising patronage or of rising without a patron.

"This looks well," said he to himself. "Two book binding orders in the first week, and two friends made. I may find a fortune in my

old press after all? But am I never to hear the last of my runaway folly? I thought in coming here I had turned my back on the past, and here I am face to face with it again. No matter, if Mr. Grace keeps silent, there is no one else to reproach me."

Six weeks later Catherine and poor Susannah Finch, who had given her heart before she knew the gift had no value, between them stirred up sluggish Thomas to visit his brother, and ascertain what cause he had for the melancholy tone of his letters.

"What's the matter with you, Will?" he asked. "You look as grave as a monument. Have you no trade?"

"Pretty fair for a new beginner. The trade hath fully supported me. I have not allowed my expenses to exceed five shillings a week, so there hath been a surplus to extend my stock. But I am lonely."

"Lonely with all these books about you?" droned out Thomas in surprise. "Have you no time to read?"

"Yes, and I do read. But I cannot shut my life and soul up in a book as you do, Thomas. My heart asks for human friendship and sympathy. My tongue and my limbs are stiff from want of exercise. My mind feels like a stagnant pond with the duckweed growing over it."

Thomas shook his head. He did not understand the case, and said so. "Books to read! Your own master! Long evenings and Sundays for walks. Mrs. Dix and your customers to talk to; let alone the two good friends you have made; and *lonely!* Do you go to meeting?"

"No, I am ashamed of my old coat."

"Then I'm ashamed of you. If you cannot thank God for the blessings you have in the best He has bestowed you deserve no better, and Catherine would tell you so."

A new idea seemed to illuminate his face and brain. "Mappen you are pining after some girl in Nottingham. Is it Susannah Finch? Catherine takes to her."

"I'm not pining for any girl. Dolly Parker gave me a sickening of them. If I could only hear the hum of our Catherine's wheel now and then, or her voice to cheer me I should be blithe as a bee."

"Aye, Will, you were always down in the dumps or up in the sky. As your trade improves so will your spirits."

"Ah, Thomas, I am not framed for monotony, you are. Come, I will lock my door and show you the town, for variety." A proceeding so common among small shopkeepers at the time was temporary closing, that Thomas assented without remark.

He went back to report that Will was thriving, but pining for companionship. He thought for some sweetheart. Whereat Susannah Finch was comforted. She must have patience and wait.

CHAPTER XVI.

RECOGNITIONS.

Slowly trod the steeds of Time for William, but they trod golden-footed. Before the year had completed its cycle he had saved twenty pounds, paid Mr. Rudsdall, added new books to his old stock, and an intelligent friend or two to his list.

Melancholy vanished before prosperity. He was induced to listen to the persuasions of Dr. Dowler and Mr. Grace, and shift his quarters to more commodious premises, namely, the shop and house adjoining Mr. Grace's in the Gateway.

It must be understood that from the steep and open Bull Ring (at the bottom of which St. Martin's Church lay perdue among houses), and which within its area held the bull stake, the town pump, the shambles, the Old Market Cross, and the general market, the road gradually narrowed into the High Town—afterwards High Street—until behind the Welsh Cross it forked off left and right through narrow Bull Street to Wolver-

hampton, and through wider Dale End to Coleshill. The New Street of fair red brick and stone, graced by the Free Grammar School, and rows of stately trees, with here a garden, there a cottage in its midst, should have opened fairly out of the High Town at a right angle on the left, but for three obstructive houses, which partially blocked the end of the street, leaving only a narrow entrance on the north, covered by a portion of Mr. Grace's house. And these obstructive buildings were known as the Gateway. The pile had originally been the Leather Hall, when leather formed the staple trade of the town, and the office of leather-seller was not a mere sinecure. It also contained the Town Hall, and the Toll House where market and excise dues were paid. It may be supposed it had been a fine building in its time, pargetted between the beams, and having pargetted walls within. It had so long been converted into dwellings that its old name had lapsed.

The swine market was held in New Street, in the immediate rear of this gateway, and the beast market very little farther away in High Town. The vicinity could not be either fragrant or quiet, but the Post Office, where all the new mail coaches stopped, was also in New Street, and consequently the cramped entrance, barely wide enough for a vehicle to

pass, was a busy thoroughfare, and the ancient gateway a good business location.

For some time the sluggish blood of the Huttons had been at issue with the energetic fluid of the Wards.

"What! venture on a house without furniture, and on a rent of eight pounds. The suggestion is appalling! I might lose all I have made!" he argued.

"And thee might multiply it twenty-fold. If thee hast made anything in thy half-shop, thee may surely make more in a whole one under improved conditions. There is not a better spot for trade in all the town. I have tried it," urged the friendly Mr. Grace.

"Pah! you are already cramped for space here. The premises are dirty. Mrs. Dix at her door would frighten ladies away with her coarse tongue and arms akimbo. Your business is expanding, you already need more room for both books and bookbinding. Besides, if you mean to invite trade you must make a show, for which there is no room here." This was the argument of Dr. Dowler, backed by the offer of his snuff-box for a companion pinch.

"Make a show!" Those were weighty words to throw into the fluctuating balance of William Hutton's mind. It had ever been his aim to make a good appearance.

Early in the new year he had taken possession of the newly-painted and stencilled premises adjoining Mr. Grace. He had made some little alterations in fixtures with his own ready hands, displayed his goods, set up his press where he could be seen at work in his white apron, which held a pocket for small tools; and ere long a swinging sign displayed to all who could run *and* read, that William Hutton was at once a Bookseller, Bookbinder, and "Lent Books on Hire."

For no one had that sign such fascination as for himself. The sight of his own name there emblazoned was an assurance that he had taken a step forward, and taken it boldly. He was proud of his own daring, and trod the empty floors of the strong old house with a full sense of his own importance as a tradesman and a householder. Yet, a common table, a couple of chairs, and a squab-sofa to serve as a bed, with a few articles of ironware and crockery, were all he could boast in the way of furniture, if we include the tinder-box, the candlesticks for his shop counter, and their attendant snuffers and tray.

But even that was an advance from the bed under the counter, and he sat down at night in his back-parlour to cast up his accounts, read a book or compose a poem, smiling on fortune since fortune smiled on him.

He indulged in no extravagances, his diet was frugal as ever, he had no servants, no errand boy—customers in those days did not disdain to carry home their own purchases—he was attentive and conversable, knew something more than the outsides of the books he sold, people who came once came twice, either to hire or to buy; and his expenses being of the lightest his profits were profits.

For five years he had not indulged in the luxury of a new best coat. The death of a Royal Duke gave him an opportunity to display at once his loyalty and his stability by ordering a full suit of black broadcloth from a draper in the Bull Ring, whom he paid in advance.

He was alone in his shop when the clothes were brought home. The bearer, a bow-legged little fellow, with watery eyes, set up a shout of surprised recognition as he laid his parcel on the counter and fixed his eyes on the face of William.

"Whoy, is that yo? Wheere's yor mester?"

"I have no master."

"No mester? Dun yo meean to say yo're *Mr. Hutton*, th' mester o' this shop, an' that them cloathes I've bin stitchin' an' pressin' be fur yo?"

"Certainly I do."

"Sartenly yo do!" he said with a sneer

which struck off into something like exasperation. "Then yo han had th' devil's own luck sin' I fell in wi' yo on th' road to Lunnon, mester! Yo wur poor enough then; hadna so much as a penny to spare fur a pint o' ale to wet yor whistle!"

William Hutton was wofully annoyed. The man's tones were not low and silvery; he was afraid lest passers-by should overhear. For a moment he hesitated whether he should repudiate his own identity and deny all knowledge of the little tailor. But with Francis Grace for so near a neighbour it did not do to risk an angry altercation on such a subject, and he could not, moreover, resist the opportunity to preach a sermon on his favourite text.

"If I had spent my pennies in whetting my whistle, Tommy Green, I should never have been the master of this shop, or any other. My luck hath been the luck of frugal industry. Every man hath his fortune in his own hand. The hand of Industry gathers, the hand of Indolence scatters. If your needles had stitched up a bag to preserve the pennies you have spent in pints, you might have been your own master by this time."

"Nowt o' th' soart! I've niver had nowt but ill-luck."

"Ah, the old cry! My man, ill-luck is the luck of laziness."

The man's face darkened. "I say, mester, yo said that i' Leicester. Tak' yor cloathes an' gie me back th' wrap, an' be hanged to yo, sin yo han nowt fur a poor chap but preachin'!"

William's fingers were struggling with an obstinate knot in the string round the parcel.

"Here, cut it!" cried the tailor impatiently, bringing forth a pair of ready scissors.

"Nay, that would be waste. The string may serve again. Unthriftiness in small matters will keep a man poor. To thrive one must save as well as get. You see the knot is untied."

"Ugh! It's ill arguing between a full pocket an' a empty un. If thah's lit o' thy feet I hanna. I' th'parts I come from they dunna think much o' a bit o' bant. I dunna belong here. I left whoam to seek my fortin', an' ha'gone farther to fare waur. I little thowt I wur stitchin' yon black coat and breeches fur an upstart like thee, or I'd ha'——"

What he would have done was cut short by the advance of William's hand across the counter with a couple of pence in it. "Here, take these, and be off. Don't melt them in pints, but keep them as nest eggs."

"Nest eggs," muttered Tommy Green as he went down the street to melt the pence in the first pubilc-house. "Foine nest eggs! Two

penny-pieces! I'd hauve a mind to gie un a crack o'th' yed fur prating to me. I'm as good a mon as he. 'The luck o' laziness!' An' fortin in ivry mon's hand! Anny cock can crow on its own dunghill! He'd best not crow over me anny more." And so on, until he washed down his words but not his envy with his first pint of ale. The ale bought with pence acquired by steady hard work, self-denial, and minute savings.

Did Tommy Green thank the giver of pence or lesson?

Not he. He had snatched at the wrap, and taken the gratuity with only a feeling of resentment against the giver, because he was in a position to give. How he had risen did not concern the envious little tailor. That the man he had met on the road seemingly as poor as himself had in two years become master of a good shop, whilst he sat stitching on another man's shop-board for what would barely keep him in meat and drink, made the ale as gall and wormwood to him. The very contrast of the bookseller's upright bearing and sturdy build with his own unshapely limbs served to embitter him still more.

Altogether, whether with his personal superiority, his success or his preaching, or all combined, he had made an enemy for life of the insignificant little tippling tailor.

The man had not overrated his dexterity with his needle, but the sharp little implement often lay idle, his tongue never did. It was that which led to quarrels, and quarrels to fisticuffs between himself and his mates.

Over his ale can he vented his spleen at the "upstart bookbinder." Many ears are open in a public house, and the credit of a newcomer into a neighbourhood is easily sapped. Then on he went to his employers to lower "the coxcomb" there. William Hutton's shop after all could be no great matter compared with the older ones of Aris, and Warren, and a suggestiveness of instability found ready credence where least expected.

As a householder, Mr. Hutton was, of course, answerable for ordinary rates, or levies. Much to his surprise, he was summoned before the Overseers. There he was closely questioned respecting his means and his birth-place, as a matter of parish settlement; and he was not only coarsely told to produce the certificate of his baptism, but threatened with removal from the town unless he complied, since they expected he would become a bankrupt, and chargeable upon the parish.

It was in vain he assured them he was solvent, that he paid for his goods with cash, that he offered the money for the levies. To have accepted them would have been to have

given him a settlement in Birmingham. The offer was rejected with contempt. "Produce your certificate!" was all the voice of authority would say.

This he could not do. In reply to him his father only wrote, "I am very sorry, Bill, but All Saints', Derby, does not grant certificates."

There was another appearance before the Overseers, another scene of badgering and browbeating, another refusal of the levies tendered. And so from time to time the contest was renewed, and so, though his trade increased, he was persecuted with insulting implications; and although his friends Dr. Dowler and Mr. Grace vouched for his character and responsibility, he was kept on the tenter-hooks of fear lest he should be dislodged.

Naturally enough, he attributed this to the ill-nature of trade rivalship; to the resentment of established booksellers against an interloper who had presumed to check bookselling by book *lending*. He never sought for a cause so low as the spiteful tongue of a little journeyman tailor.

He had put on his glossy black suit, and surveyed himself as well as he could in his small looking-glass, on the Sunday morning, without a second thought of Tommy Green.

More than satisfied with his own appear-

ance, he added a new three-cornered hat to his equipment, and a silver-capped stick that had once belonged to Mr. Webb, and joined the stream of loyal black-coated individuals on their way to the New Meeting House in Digbeth, not as heretofore to take a seat in an obscure corner, but to walk down the aisle to a seat he could call his own.

The new Meeting House was a long plain building with a single row of lights, and was entered by a couple of doors on either side a high window at the western end. Each door led to a separate aisle.

As William Hutton walked down the one, a young man already seated in a square pew on the opposite aisle fixed his eyes upon him with a sort of bewildered recognition. Once or twice during the service William chanced to look that way and their eyes met. "I have seen that gentleman somewhere before," was the thought of each.

As the congregation dispersed they left the Meeting House by different doors, and very shortly William Hutton heard a voice at his elbow saying, "Your servant, sir. I think we have met somewhere before. Have you any remembrance?"

William coloured to the roots of his hair. (He had never mounted a fresh wig). Was he never to put his past behind him? Was

he so remarkable that neither years nor dress could efface the 'prentice lad? The brisk, cheery voice that addressed him was scarcely needed as a reminder of the speaker, for he had been well dressed when they had met eleven years before.

There was a little lingering false shame in William Hutton's reply.

"Yes, sir, I remember you well, and I remember how kindly you directed an unfortunate lad to Mr. Grace the hosier."

The other eyed him over. "You must have prospered since then."

"Yes, sir, but not at the stocking-frame. I am the bookseller, next door to Mr. Grace in the Gateway. My name is William Hutton."

"Indeed, and mine is William Ryland. There ought to be good-will between us; I am pleased to hear of your success, and will give you a call before long."

The one call led to many and to life-long friendship and fellowship. Hutton's poems were about that time finding their way into magazines. Mr. Ryland introduced him to other members of the congregation as a bookseller and a poet; and ere long his circulating library became the resort both of ladies and gentlemen, who found him alike conversable and obliging. Indeed he was vain enough to imagine that one or two of the

former who railed him on his bachelorhood, would not have objected to have put an end to it. But, the freedom of the period notwithstanding, he was proof against feminine advances. He had had his "all sufficient warning" from a girl he had loved. He had grown fastidious.

Notwithstanding the persecution of the Overseers, his trade was extending, and with it his ideas. Sundry articles of furniture had found their way into his house, but a feminine hand was lacking to arrange and put in order. Bed and windows were curtainless and bare, and so he told his sister Catherine when he wrote.

He had an answer back from Mrs. Perkins very promptly.

"Nottingham, August 24, 1751.

"Dear William,—

"I hope you are well as this leaves us at the present. You want a good wife to keep you and your house in order. I will come and make all orderly and comfortable for you. I shall bring with me a young lady I think will suit you well for a wife. You need not leave your shop to meet us at the carrier's inn. Saturday is no day to neglect business; and I can find my way. Samuel hath come back to Nottingham. Roving hath not done much for

him. He is in a sad plight. Aunt Ann and her husband claim him as a runaway 'prentice on the old indentures. I stand out against it, since Uncle George is dead, and Aunt Ann cannot teach him frame-knitting. Robert Tanner offers to teach him whip-making. I have not yet decided what to do for him. But he is now eighteen, with no trade in his fingers to earn a living by. Thomas jogs on in the old course: works, reads, eats, sleeps. Nottingham was shaken by an earthquake yesterday, which threw the whole town into consternation. Thomas came home from his work as composed as if nothing had occurred to disturb him. You need not provide for us. I shall bring my own provisions and my own sheets. Until we meet,

"I remain,

"Your affectionate sister,

"CATHERINE PERKINS."

William read the letter more than once. He had now been his own master and manager for nearly two years, and something jarred against his sense of independence.

"Catherine's a wonderful woman, not her equal anywhere," he said; "but matrimony is a man's own concern. I prefer choosing a wife for myself. Surely the young *lady* cannot know Catherine's intention! If she does,

she is no wife for me. Tastes change with time; what suited me in the old days will not suit me now. I am rising. I must have a wife with manners and education; one who can rise with me. Besides, there is no hurry —if Catherine thinks so. I can hire a housekeeper, as Mr. Grace advises, and I could get an apprentice but for those ill-natured Overseers, and their threat to remove me. It would be folly to marry with that hanging over me, whoever our Catherine may have brought. I've grown dainty since the days when Dolly Parker could enslave me. Poor Dolly, I wonder what has become of her and her children! If Francis Field made good use of his father's little property they may have a comfortable home now. Surely the old man's death would act as a check to him. So should the hanging of Harris. I heard that his shrewish daughter had been whipped through the streets of Nottingham. I wonder if it was true?"

And so William's thoughts wandered from the subject of the letter before him, as he sat cogitating alone in his carpetless back parlour after his shop was shut, with a single mould candle to light up the gloom. It was not weather for a fire.

Presently, *àpropos* of nothing, he broke out, "I wonder what that niece of Mr. Grace

is like now? He said she was coming to keep house for him. She does not hurry. I am curious to see her. She was a sweet little child." Then after a pause, "I must make *some* preparation for Catherine and her friend. A bachelor's house like mine might scare a sensitive young lady. No carpets, no looking glasses, no china, no soft cushions! I must be up betimes in the morning to see what such things will cost. Catherine is not wise to bring a strange young lady here. No matter, I am making friends of my own. An improving position demands improved surroundings—within reason. I wish I knew who Catherine's new friend can be! What lady can she know?"

There was certainly no inner prompting. When Mrs. Perkins, heavily laden, walked into his shop on the Saturday afternoon, with her companion, he opened wide both eyes and mouth, dumb with astonishment.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. PERKINS'S MISTAKE.

Miss Finch was the travelling companion of Mrs. Perkins!

A momentary contraction of William's lips and brows succeeded his blank amazement before he put forth his hand or said a word of kindly greeting.

Miss Finch blushed, smiled, caught his change of countenance, cast down her eyes, and looked foolish.

"Ah! She knows—shows her consciousness! Susannah, you are as artful as your father," was his unspoken verdict, as he put out his hand first to his sister, then to her, and ushered them into his back parlour with as much cordiality as he could muster up.

"So! this is the young *lady*, is she? Catherine has thought to catch me in a trap, and *she* has lent herself to the trick!"

Utterly unjust were his suspicions, but Susannah's embarrassment only confirmed them. She had come with Mrs. Perkins readily enough, perhaps too readily, nothing doubting

her welcome, and clinging to a straw of hope, but that one glance at William's face had told her that she was as undesired as unexpected, and she wished herself a thousand miles away. Even Catherine Perkins saw that something was wrong, but she never struck her colours and never owned to defeat.

She set down the heavy basket she was carrying, and with one roving glance around the room—the satisfactory appointment of which had cost William thought, time, and money—took in the whole, from the iron grate that held the fire instead of the open hearth, the copper kettle singing on the hob, the mahogany tea-board with its Staffordshire tea-ware—handleless cups and saucers a shade less tiny than their foreign-china prototypes—the brass fender and handirons, the square of carpet across the hearth, the new oaken chairs and the older squab sofa, the corner cupboard, the old oak desk on a shelf by the fire, and a pile of untidy books on the floor under the cupboard.

Her face softened as she noted the evident preparations for their coming.

"Um! Things are more comfortable than I expected, for a bachelor," she said approvingly; "but you do want a woman here to sweep away the cobwebs and smarten you up a bit."

Cobwebs! He had seen no cobwebs, had not thought of them.

"What an eye Catherine has!" he said to himself. "But she has opened fire too soon." Aloud he observed, "I am looking for a servant."

"You need someone," was her quick response, and then she turned to Susannah, who was still standing, and said, "Sit down, child, and give me the bag," referring to one Susannah had brought with her.

A tap on the counter summoned William into his shop.

"Where shall we put our apparel?" asked Catherine.

"Upstairs." And he was gone, thinking as he went, "I'd not have spent so much had I known the *lady* was Susannah Finch. Less might have served her."

The stairs were not far to seek. Only a brown door shut them off from the room, into which the lowest stair obtruded, and only a square hole in the inclosing partition gave light to the stairway.

Up they went to the apartment above the shop. There were the same signs of preparation. The floor had been scrubbed—after a fashion—the curtainless bed was not new, the chairs and table had evidently done duty downstairs, but the strips of carpet and the

small swing looking-glass were luxuries, and new.

Whether this had been done to honour herself or the lady she might bring, there is no question that Mrs Perkins felt proud of the brother who had by dint of industry, frugality, and shrewdness laid by a sum he could draw upon at will. She had been striving and saving nearly all her life, but he was the only one of her brothers who had shown a like capacity.

But furniture alone did not make a home comfortable in her sight; there was wanting the super-cleanliness of which her own dwelling was so bright an example. There was dust in corners and on ledges where only a woman would have looked for it, dust that had lingered long undisturbed. The floor-scrubbing had been a very sorry affair, and the bed-making was no better.

"We will show him what women can do before we go back," said Mrs. Perkins smartly, as she remade the bed, substituting her own sheets for the coarse ill-washed ones she found there.

"I think I will go back with the carrier on Monday," sighed Susannah timidly, "Mr. Hutton does not want me here; I ought not to have come uninvited."

"Nonsense, child. *I* invited you. We

must teach him to want you before we go back. I know what I'm about."

Susannah opened her eyes and looked bewildered. Mrs. Perkins had let a flood of light in upon her that dazed her. For the first time she saw *why* she had been invited, and wondered how Mrs. Perkins had penetrated her secret, little wotting how transparent it had been.

"Oh, Mrs. Perkins!" was all she could say, but she followed her downstairs in a flutter and confusion sure to be misinterpreted.

When William's customer was gone he found the tea made and a loaf of Catherine's own baking on the table. Likewise a couple of fowls ready cooked, and a large piece of boiled bacon, whilst kidney beans, lettuces, and onions from her own garden still remained at the bottom of her big basket, as she did not fail to tell him.

"I knew you had no cook, so I brought fowls ready dressed to avoid cooking on the Sunday, so that we might go with you to the meeting."

She seated herself at the table and began to pour out the tea, and order him and Susannah to do this or that as in the old days in her own house, and he felt as if his own mastership was slipping away from him.

Her "Come, Susannah, cut the bread and

butter," was anything but reassuring. It seemed as if they had taken possession of him and his house, and Susannah was being set in some sort of authority there. Her very embarrassment, instead of exciting sympathy, told against her.

At the same time as he talked to them of their two days' journey in the waggon among boxes and baskets, and helped himself plentifully to the bread and butter she had cut, he confessed to himself it was pleasant to have some one to wait on him, and to keep him company over the evening meal. Then he found the cup of warm tea more refreshing than the mug of ale or milk with which he was wont to accompany his customary hunch of bread, as often eaten without cheese or butter as with it.

But it did not make him one whit the better pleased with Susannah Finch. He inwardly resented the way in which she had been introduced with a set purpose, and when on the morrow after a breakfast of milk porridge, which Catherine had prepared, they came down stairs equipped for the Meeting House, he would gladly have dispensed with their company had it been possible to escape.

Not that there was anything vulgar or unbecoming in their attire—if there had been he was scarcely a judge—Catherine never

wore a hoop, and at all times dressed with as much simplicity as a Quakeress. Her gown was of soft grey silk, had been the best dress of Mr. Rudsdall's dead wife, becomingly altered. Her bonnet was of new black satin, without fashionable eccentricities.

Susannah, on the contrary, had her long stomachered dress of purple tabinet, slightly inflated by a flexible hoop, whilst the hood of her scarlet capuchin set off her unpowdered black hair. There were silver buckles on her high-heeled shoes, and her arms were cased in long gloves. Mr. Finch had sent her forth to the best of his ability, and if she failed to make a conquest, it was no fault of his.

William would have been proud to escort his quiet and dignified sister—five years his elder—anywhere, but he felt wofully disconcerted on being called upon to parade a smartly-dressed young girl, all blushes, down the aisle of the new Meeting House in the face of so many customers and acquaintances, who were sure to rally him on his gallantry afterwards.

Not that he was at all bashful, or would have felt the same hesitation in Nottingham where both were known; but now that he was aiming at something higher than he had been or was, and had been noticed by people

of position in his adopted town, he felt the need of treading cautiously, and instead of giving his full attention to the primitive service, fancied himself a mark for all eyes.

As they came out, one or another nodded to him, as he thought, significantly; Mr. Ryland shook hands with him, and asked, if looks could ask, for an introduction. In giving it, William Hutton was careful to say, not merely "My sister, Mrs. Perkins," but "Miss Finch, my sister's friend," so fearful was he of any misconstruction on either side.

The cautious distinction smote Susannah's ear painfully. Her heart fell. The graceful courtesy which should have acknowledged such introduction at that time was wanting. She felt her own awkwardness, and William felt it too.

He was little better pleased when at the gateway the two whipped off their head gear, and mounting large coverall aprons, laid the cloth and set the dinner on the table whilst he looked on; and then cleared away the dishes when all was over.

He invited them afterwards to take a walk round the town, and showed them all he thought most noteworthy: St. Philip's Church, the Blue Coat School, the fine new house Mr. Baskerville, the japanner, had just built

for himself in a quiet suburban spot he called Easy Hill, and which seemed to have a special attraction for him; but all his conversation on what they saw, or what they had left behind in Nottingham, was addressed to both impartially.

His disposition was too cheerful to admit of sullenness or ill-humour; he had long been lonely, and he liked his company too well to be bearish or unmannerly, but he never lowered his voice, or spoke aside to Susannah, never showed by lingering glance, or touch, or tone, that she was more to him than another, whilst she, poor girl, in every look or movement told where she had set all the aspirations of her heart. That night, she again proposed that she and Mrs. Perkins should return home with the carrier's waggon on the morrow.

"Nothing of the sort. I came here to put William's house in order. I don't go back until it is done. You will have to help me. I intend him to see what a difference a woman makes in a house, and what a clever, active girl you are. Because he found a slut-tish hovel in Charnwood, and heard the wife had been a pretty girl and a belle before she married, and moreover because your father's shop was grimy and dusty, he seems afraid to venture on a wife, and to have turned

against you, my lass. I know you are not accountable for the grime in your father's shop, and I must convince William that he was mistaken before we go back."

Accordingly he was called upon to disburse money for brushes and pails, and from top to bottom the place underwent a thorough cleansing and brightening. Next, a quantity of blue-checked gingham had to be bought, and two industrious needles transformed it into curtains and valances for bed and windows. His two table-cloths and his sheets were hemmed, his crockery set in order, his squab so far had a new cover to match the curtains, and the windows were made to see through. She sent Susannah out to market, she set her to cook, and William looked on the result well pleased.

But he felt the "intention" of it all, and his heart was closed as with a door.

He had never been in love with Susannah Finch, and love was not to be forced. He had liked her well, and liking might have ripened into love, had not the glimpse he had of Dolly, and the dirt to which she had descended, set him against the girl who could find time to come seeking him—so his vanity suggested—when her father's shop cried aloud for a brush and a duster. He did not know that old Finch had "a mortal dread of a

dusting woman among his books." Years before, William had himself felt the pangs of unrequited love. It is to be feared he had less sympathy with Susannah Finch's wounded affection than it deserved. He might not know how she had been thrown in his way, but he must have known he had paid her some gratuitous attention, and that he was scarcely justified in his sudden coldness. In guarding himself against possible disappointment, he had not sufficiently thought what hers might be.

Something of this Catherine had told him, and warmly, on the morning of their departure, whilst Susannah was packing her travelling-bag upstairs. Something else had occurred to ruffle her equable temper besides his evident dislike to have a wife forced upon him.

Catherine had inquired for the volumes she had lent him on show.

"As you have now a good stock, and can no longer need them, they can go back with us in my basket."

Her brother looked confounded. After some stammering and hesitation, he confessed that he had "sold them."

She jumped to her feet. "Sold them!" she exclaimed, "sold the books my master gave me as a token of respect! Sold them!

after your solemn promise that you would keep them clean, and never part with them until I recalled my own! I am ashamed of your want of principle. I blush for you."

"Do not say so, Catherine; I really could not help it. Once or twice I could have sold them before, but when Mr. Baskerville had set his mind on them, I was afraid of offending a good customer, and really did not know how to refuse them."

"And prithee who is this Mr. Baskerville, whose custom could make you break your solemn promise? Who is this stranger you were more afraid of offending than me?" she said, with unwonted severity.

"I showed you his grand house last Sunday. It is a wonderful place inside. The staircase and firegrates are of fine wrought iron, for which he made his own designs. He is a japanner, and has had a business in Birmingham for several years, but he does not belong to the town, he comes from a village called Wolverly, in Worcestershire."

Mrs. Perkins evinced signs of impatience. She interrupted him. "What has that to do with *my books?*"

"Well, he is turning printer, and moulding his own types for superior book-work. Of course, he will require paper and binding in large quantities. I hope to become his paper

merchant. Should I have been wise to have exposed myself, and offended him by avowing that the books were not mine, and only kept on my shelves for show? He hath been very gracious hitherto, and a——"

"You forgot your past obligations to me and bowed to the rising sun. It may be I have no right to blame you, since in lending you the books for show only, I myself prompted deception. But I am not the less annoyed and displeased." And she showed it, for her face had as warm a tinge as her hair, guiltless of powder.

Many were his apologies, but the fact remained. She was not disposed to overlook it. Presently he unlocked his desk, and from a little bag produced five guineas, and laid them on the table before her.

"I know I am under the very greatest obligations to you, Catherine," he said, "the greatest are those I can never repay, but whilst you are here it becomes me to return somewhat of your loans to me. I had first ten guineas and then three; here are five. That will leave me eight in your debt. If I had not spent so much in preparing for an unknown visitor, there would have been more for you."

There might have been a little taint of acrimony in his tone as he said this, for Catherine's prompt return was,

"I did not look for repayment till you were firmly established, but I did expect a warmer reception for Susannah. She hath done all she could to make your home snug and comfortable. Contrast what it is with what we found it, and think what a good wife she would make!"

"I can hire a servant to cook and scrub. Something more is wanted in a wife, Catherine. She must possess my highest affection and esteem, and I do not perceive any strong leaning towards Miss Finch in my breast."

"You are either very fickle, William, or you have found a new sweetheart in Birmingham. Take care you do not go through the wood and take up the crooked stick at last."

"I am not half through the wood yet," and he laughed, but he had certainly displeased his strong-willed sister, and did not himself feel conscience-clear over his conduct to Susannah Finch.

But he let them depart, his sister too independent and too indignant to accept his escort to the carrier's, Miss Finch discouraged and abashed.

"We came by ourselves heavily laden, we can surely return by ourselves having lighter loads," was the decided rebuff of the former, as she proffered her hand to his clasp, not her cheek to his kiss.

"No, thank you, Mr. Hutton; I need no gift to remind me of this visit, and I cannot accept such a return for small services rendered to a friend," said Susannah, with more of maidenly reserve and wounded delicacy than he had counted on as she quietly put back a pair of bright steel shoe-buckles he had proffered, "as a memento of the visit, and in return for her kind housewifery."

Her hand trembled for a moment in his clasp, but there was no lover-like pressure as he shook it at parting, and she followed the erect figure of Mrs. Perkins up the High Town in the early morning, glad there were so few people about to observe her humid eyes and discomposed countenance.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.;
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.